AUGUST

Weird Tales

25c

• THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD •

THING OF DARKNESS

a compelling story of a slinking Thing of horror and sinister menace

by G. G. PENDARVES

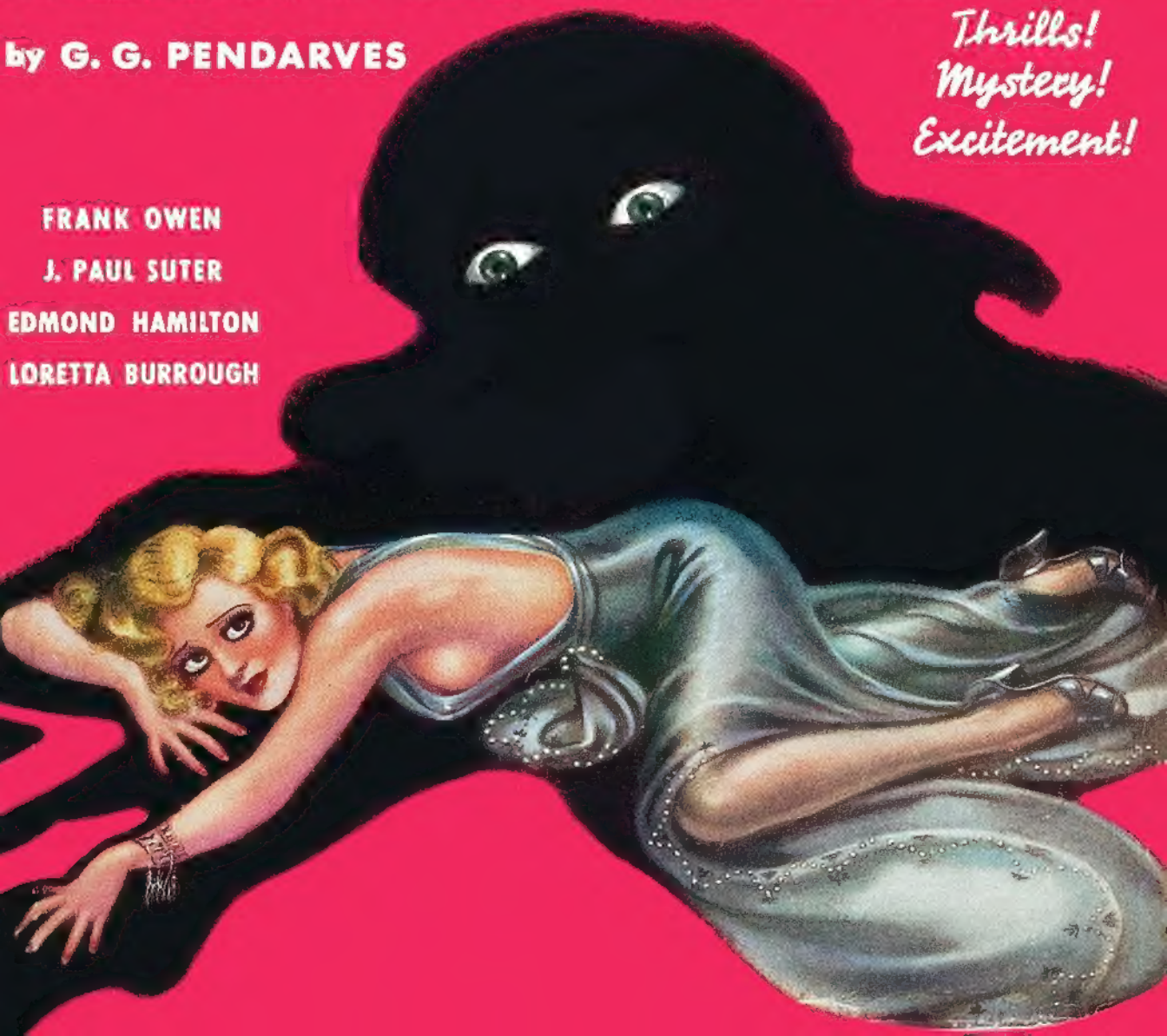
Thrills! Mystery! Excitement!

FRANK OWEN

J. PAUL SUTER

EDMOND HAMILTON

LORETTA BURROUGH



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The first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

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"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

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"KWO"

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Thing of Darkness

By G. G. PENDARVES

A compelling and fascinating novelette about a Thing of horror and darkness—a destroying, ravening Thing that brought death to Troon House

A LONG curving sweep of tall gray houses. At their feet the old parade, its worn sea-wall banked up against wind-driven tides. Troon House, grayer, gaunter than the rest, stood empty. A signboard creaked on rusted hinges, advertising it *For Sale or To Let.*

Lonely. Lovely. Deserted.

Seagate was proud of Troon House. Seagate was afraid of it. People came by the score to see it, always in broad daylight. They were careful to keep in groups, silent, timid, turning a sharp corner, entering each unexplored room with that sudden jolt that a clumsily manipulated elevator gives to one's heart.

They stared at beautiful restorations, at blackened beams, at vast wall-cupboards, and at brick fireplaces whose ancient clay showed every tint of umber, rose and purple-brown. They bunched together closely going up the last steep narrow stairs to the west attic. They looked at its deep recess, recently and fatally uncovered — looked and shuddered.

They went in close order downstairs again, escaped through low-roofed, red-tiled kitchens to a long untended garden behind the house and thence to a broad lane and main road at last. Shaken, nervously loquacious, they didn't speak of Troon until the old place was out of sight. Over tea and famous Seagate shrimps they exchanged impressions.

Going home after sunset, if they stayed so long, they glanced in passing along the road, at Troon's blank front windows, shivered, looked quickly away.

Troon—gray old house, left to hideous memories of the Thing of Darkness. Day by day, night by night, through the years, through the centuries Troon had stood. Old, forsaken, betrayed. Old Troon—shell of death—old Troon.

LOW sullen clouds. A cold northwest wind. Fierce squalling gusts of rain. A high angry tide, gray-green flecked with bitter white, roaring up the estuary. Seagate was a mile of wet gray road and blank-faced houses. Wind and sea . . . wind and sea.

At the village-church of Keston, a fifteen minutes walk away on the hill behind, the broken body of Joe Dawlish with its staring tortured eyes and twisted face of fear was being buried. And in another grave, a sad small grave, the bones of Lizzy Werne were being laid to rest after three hundred years delay.

People thronged the small churchyard to its broad low moss-stained walls. From Seagate, from Keston, from all over the Wirral peninsula, and even from Liverpool and Chester they had come to witness this double funeral. Reporters, psychic investigators, university professors rubbed wet shoulders with fishermen, farmers, shop-keepers and local gentry.

At the end, the very end when the last words of the service were said and it only remained for the gaping graves to be filled in, the vicar stood with uplifted hands. His somber gaze looked out over

the crowd to tossing trees and lowering sky. His lined face, wet with rain, was worn and anxious.

Suddenly his voice rang out again, a cry from the heart of this shepherd of a stricken flock . . . "*Deliver us, O Lord, from all assaults of the devil! In thine infinite mercy, protect and succor us! Stretch forth thy hand against this Thing of Darkness and set us free from fear! In the name of Him who died for us—Amen.*"

There was a murmurous response like water breaking on a distant shore. Then, slowly, silently, pelted by spiteful icy rain, the crowd dispersed.

At the lich-gate Doctor Dick Thornton was pushed up against two people he wanted to avoid: Edith and Alec Kinloch. Alec's heavy sallow face showed distinct traces of emotion. He looked quite appealingly at Doctor Dick.

"'Fraid I didn't take all this quite seriously before," he confessed. "I don't understand what it's all about, but——"

Edith put a restraining hand on his arm. He was having one of his emotional moments, she could see. Heaven knew what he might say! Probably he would double his already absurdly generous offer of five pounds to the widow. What a blessing she could count on herself never to lose *her* head! Queer sort of service it had been. These villagers

"In the smoking lamplight, she saw the vast ugly bulk, the bloated face, the small cruel eyes under matted hair."

adored emotional orgies. Well, poor things, they must have some pleasure in their dull stupid lives. Clever of the vicar to stage such a good show for them. He knew how to cater for a rural diocese.

To deflect her husband from possible weakness she turned to the young girl behind her.

"Lynneth, this is Doctor Thornton. He's a sort of uncle to all the fishermen of Seagate. Miss Lynneth Brey, Doctor Thornton. A connection of my husband's. She's going to spend a month or so with us—at Troon."

There, Edith thought, that'll let him know right off that they've not succeeded in scaring us. Her tactics were wasted. The doctor didn't even hear her. He was looking down into Lynneth's uplifted rosy face. Black eyes, soft, sooty, heart-catching. Eyes made for tears and laughter and —oh, yes! he knew at once—made for love. He looked deep, deeper into them; young, radiant, kindled with recent deep emotion. Eyes to light a man's path, to draw him on and up, above life's dusty sordid clamor. Eyes that promised and withheld.

Doctor Dick's feet were treading air, his heart thumped with the beat-beat-beat of hooves on a hollow road, his head felt full of fizzy champagne. But no one guessed it. He heard his voice, it didn't seem to surprize anyone, replying to the introduction. He waited with parted lips, eyes a clear tender blue, listening—listening for her voice.

"Oh!" She considered him. A smile drew her lips in an adorable sideways quirk. "You make me feel homesick, although I've only been here a day. You speak like a Highlander."

"I am one. From Gairloch."

She put out a small hand to be enveloped in his close grip, and laughed in quick delight.

"That's *my* place. My own darling funny village. My mother's birthplace. We've got a cottage there. D'you remember it? . . . the one like a brown loaf at the head of Glen Ruach."

They drifted from the churchgate, away down the twisting road. The crowd of people might have been blown wet leaves. The two Kinlochs, left behind, exchanged long glances.

"Let 'em go." Alec took his wife's arm. "Birds of a feather—eh? She and Pills can keep each other amused. Looks like a case to me. You won't be bothered with her long."

"Really, Alec! There's the garage—what on earth are you dragging me on for? I'm certainly not going to hang about for that silly girl. Going off with a man she's just met, like that! She behaves like a child. No idea of appearances."

"What odds? Nobody's going to notice a kid like that."

"Nonsense! She's connected with *us*. D'you want him for a permanent relation?"

"Why not? Get the girl off your hands while the going's good. She and Pills would run a dispensary or a nursing-home and be too busy to interfere with us. This yearly visit's beginning to pall."

She glanced shrewdly at him.

"Something in that. And even if he's queer, quite important people have taken him up. Come on, then. I'm perishing with cold. This senseless fuss! Seagate doesn't seem to have altered since Troon House was first built."

They clambered into their car and splashed down the lane to their bungalow by the marshes.

"QUITE! Quite! However, there are always two sides to everything."

Mr. Alec Kinloch presented a large bulwark of flesh from behind which his schoolboy's mind issued bulletins to the

outside world. He kept a store of such ready-made bulletins within, stereotyped responses calculated to give intimation of a subtle discerning intellect at work. He would employ such tactics indefinitely if conducting a conversation unaided. If his wife was with him she manned the big guns while he posed as an impregnable fortress.

Doctor Dick regarded the large dull pretentious creature with patience born of his profession rather than his temperament. Doctor Dick was a Highlander. Alec Kinloch a Lowland Scot. This, in itself, was a deep fixed gulf between them, apart from gulfs of breeding and intellect, and today the doctor found his host peculiarly trying. He'd made a point of calling when he knew Lynneth would not be at "Sandilands." He wanted to spare her the grim tale he had to tell. It had been an effort, however, to miss a chance of seeing her, and his mood grew steadily darker.

"What," he demanded, "would you consider the other side to this horror at Troon?"

Baffled at such direct attack, Alec poked at his pipe with an air of grave reserve. He and Edith always were careful to be non-committal in their attitude until they discovered the trend of popular feeling with reference to a new idea. This Troon ghost notion now! If Seagate took it seriously, and yesterday's funeral service seemed to indicate so, then they would follow suit. Alec had been swayed by the vicar yesterday. Now, however, he knew Edith's view was the really intelligent and logical one. The vicar had been simply playing up, doing what the villagers expected of him. Jolly good thing no one but his wife knew that he'd actually got the wind up yesterday. The "Thing of Darkness!" Uh! Nasty phrase that! He'd felt like chucking up everything—selling Troon to any fool who wanted the old place. Well, he could laugh at himself and his fears now.

But this young Pills! He seemed officious. Trying to interfere. Pulling all this stuff about haunts and devils at Troon. Warning him that the workmen restoring the old house were in danger and that he and Edith ought to give up all idea of living there. Damned young whippersnapper, sitting there at his ease and telling a man of the world what was what! He'd tell him where he got off all right!

The door opened to admit his wife. Alec crossed his legs, resumed his pipe, took up the fortress-pose as Doctor Dick rose to his feet. Edith Kinloch progressed with ceremony to a chair.

"How nice of you to call again—so soon, Doctor Thornton."

"Doctor Dick," corrected the visitor. "My father is still in practise here. We have to make a distinction."

"Oh! How awkward for you!"

Edith was slim and tall and neat. She was invariably bright and kind too. It was part of her chosen rôle to stoop kindly to her inferiors. The Lady Bountiful was her favorite part, to be gracious, to condescend. She'd been these things infuriatingly and increasingly ever since she cut free from her decent but quite uneducated family at the age of fourteen. Alec never knew to this day that her mother had a fish-and-chips shop in Edgware road, that her father was crippled and on the dole, that her younger sisters were working in a glue factory.

"My wife," Alec would tell you, believing it to be a fact, "lost both her parents—died in India when she was a child. Friends made themselves responsible for her education" [the Local Educational Council as represented by Edith's adaptable mind] "a branch of the Dorsetshire Frome-Stoddarts, you know.

Good old family but impoverished—impoverished."

Edith smiled brightly on the two men sitting before the study fire.

"I'm sure you must be cold and hungry, Doctor—Dick, if you insist on the familiarity. I just went to tell cook she must drop everything and make some of her famous hot cakes for tea. Cook is so *difficult,* but really I find the best thing is to alter her routine every now and then. I do it on principle."

She proceeded to stage-manage a background for an afternoon-tea act. Doctor Dick was used as scene-shifter. Edith directed him with firm smiling competence. He pulled up tables and pushed away chairs. She conveyed atmospherically that he was young and insignificant enough to do these things rather than Alec.

"And now *do* let's go on with all that too adorable tale you were telling us about Troon just now. So like a story of Edgar Allan Poe's. Now *don't* say you finished the tale while I was out of the room! No? *That's* right!"

She beamed approval.

"Now. We're all settled. Tea and—put on another log, Alec, the basket's beside you there—a real Christmas fire to warm you up, Doctor Dick. And eat up the scones; you must be needing something. No use calling at tea-time and not taking advantage of the fact."

Glittering gracious hostess. Her varnished toffee-brown eyes shone in the firelight. She addressed the doctor as if he were a schoolboy out for a treat. She was convinced he'd arranged purposely to call at their tea hour. So lean and hungry-looking! She plumed herself on the observation which thus misread Doctor Dick's rigidly disciplined muscular body.

"This is the only time I can call," the doctor was young enough to feel not amused at her patronage. "I pass this bungalow on my way up to Keston. Due at the hospital at five, you know."

EDITH smiled her best worldly understanding smile. Let the young man get away with his excuses, poor dear. She didn't grudge him his tea. Pity Lynneth was out. It would have been easy then to sidetrack him from the mission he felt he had concerning Troon and its restoration. She must make things plain, perfectly plain, once and for all. She leaned forward. Her glistening eyes, her perfectly smooth face, her small ungenerous mouth registered smiling cordiality.

"Now *do* tell me all about it."

Doctor Dick's blue eyes grew bleak and gray as the November afternoon. He told her. Told her details of Joe Dawlish's death. Told her of daily increasing peril at Troon. Implored her to give up the whole thing, to leave the gray haunted old house to its evil.

"The men are in hourly danger—horrible danger. You are letting loose forces that have been pent up in the place for centuries. The men should come off the job at once."

At his increasingly urgent manner, Alec and Edith Kinloch stiffened simultaneously. After all, dash it all, the house is mine, ran Alec's thoughts, and there's a limit to the interference one can stand! Edith's eyes answered his unspoken protest, agreeing with it.

Alec voiced his ideas. His tone was a subtle reproach.

"Was this Joe Dawlish working on the house when he died?"

"He was." The doctor's clipped reply roused all Alec's fathomless obstinacy.

"I suppose he was insured."

His own instant perception of the vital core of this queer fuss about Dawlish gratified him enormously. He was moved, without waiting for his wife's lead, to make a gesture.

"Well, I might give the wife a little extra. Ten pounds would pay for the funeral—handsomely. These people love a ghoulish sort of feast, don't they? 'Buried him with ham'—what!"

"Ham? Er, yes . . . quite. Ham."

Doctor Dick looked his host up and down as if he saw some connection between him and the word he reiterated. He got to his feet.

He was out of the room, out of the little entrance-hall, out of the house—stalking like a long-legged bird down the garden and on to the road almost before Edith and Alec could reply to his swift farewell. He'd been so quick, so cumbered with hat, stick and a knobby untidy parcel, that he didn't even shake hands.

Alec threw himself down in his armchair by the fire, took up a brass toasting-fork and began to warm up the remaining scones. Edith watched him absent-mindedly.

"Shut Pills up, didn't I?" he spoke with his mouth full of scone. "Nothing like getting down to brass tacks with these fellows. Driveling about spooks and Troon! Neat dodge for collecting for Dawlish's widow. Better do the thing handsomely, as we're strangers here. Living at that big house, we'll be obliged to play up a bit."

Edith continued her pursuit of abstract thought.

"Well?"

"Yes, dear."

She came out of her trance, sat forward inelegantly, a thin hand on either knee. Strong emotion did occasionally uncover the past.

"Alec, there's more in this than meets the eye. Mark my words, there's someone else after Troon. They want to turn us out, force us to sell. I dare say they've found how old and much more valuable the property is than they believed. Let 'em try!"

He wolfed the last scone, licked a buttery thumb, pulled out a large white linen handkerchief, polished his lips, arranged his mustache, hitched up his trousers at the knee and lighted a fresh pipe.

"Let 'em!" he echoed in profound sepulchral tones.

Six o'clock on a late November evening. Rain and a squalling wind from the east. A high tide slapping and hissing against the mile-long ancient sea-wall.

Jim Sanderson drove at his job in the cold drafty house with nervous hurry. A highly intelligent able workman was Jim, the best workman of the gang at Troon House.

Well over three hundred years the house was. Of late it had fallen into bad disrepair. Its landlord lived in Ireland and rented his fine old derelict to one careless tenant after another until roof and walls let in as much weather as they kept out.

The Liverpool agent loved the house. He had done his best, wrested small sums from its owner for patching here and patching there for forty odd years. But he and Troon could bluff no longer.

Would-be tenants kept on coming, for a genuine old Seagate house for sale was rare. Their verdict was unanimous. Damp! Rain drove in through deep cracks and faulty windows. Salt water used in the cement made ugly discolorations everywhere. Timbers were rotting. One roof had curvature of the spine. Toads and spiders had taken over ruined outbuildings and kitchens. Weeds, coarse grass, overgrown hedges and dumps of rubbish made a desert of the long garden at Troon's back.

At last, the agent put up enormous startling bills in each of Troon's front windows. And, suddenly, he sold the house.

The two Kinlochs saw it. They had

money. They needed an old and mellow background. They got a first-class architect to "vet" the place, found a reasonable sum would make it weatherproof, beat the Irish landlord down a little—very little, for he was savage as a cornered rat. Followed a flurry of contracts, plans, and agreements, then parleyings with the local council, who mistrusted haste and people with money to spend on a damp derelict house in Seagate. And the Kinlochs were in a hurry: they wanted to settle in before Christmas.

At last Troon House legally changed hands. The Kinlochs rented a bungalow lurking a mile away by the marshes. Troon was delivered up to the builders and decorators.

And so we return to Jim Sanderson on this gloomy November evening.

HE HAD an electric torch, for no light was yet installed in the house. By its beam he prodded furiously at a patch of decayed timber by the hearthstone. A specimen was demanded by the Mycology Section of the Forest Products Research Laboratory. Dry rot was suspected in this large front room on the ground floor. Sanderson had to send his specimen by that night's post. The other workmen were gone. He was working overtime—alone.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Somewhere in the drafty darkness upstairs a door banged persistently. It got on his nerves. He was a sensitive man in spite of his big muscular frame. Temperament, imagination, nerves were part of his quick flexible intelligence. He hated this night job. He felt queer and jumpy.

Clap! Clap! *Bang!*

There! The damned door had shut itself at last. He heaved a sigh of relief. Then his scalp prickled. Was someone up there? Had they shut the door? Was that someone coming down the broken creaking staircase?

The whites of his eyes showed like those of a frightened horse as he glanced up at the rain-blurred glass of a large bay-window on his right. Impulse seized him to dash himself at the panes, to escape to the friendly old parade just outside. Overwhelmingly he wanted to be out in the open—to exchange this dusty musty shelter for rain and salt wind and flying scuds of foam.

He'd had enough. Things had got worse and worse ever since Joe Dawlish had pulled down the cupboard in the big west attic a week ago. The wall and chimney-breast had crumbled and broken with its removal. A few stout blows, and the whole false façade had come down, revealing a deep recess reaching from rafters half-way to floor. On the broad stone shelf thus formed, a skeleton lay.

The bones of a child. Skull smashed in. A staple and chain padlocked round the bone of the left arm. The padlock was the strangest thing of all, of black smooth heavy stone with queer red markings chalked on it.

The vicar had been summoned in a hurry. He'd brought Doctor Dick with him. They were in a great taking about the affair, and carried off the poor little bones for burial.

From that hour things had gone wrong at Troon. Joe, who'd found the bones, was dead and buried inside a week—and *what* a week, too!

Sanderson's big brown hands fumbled as he tugged and strained at the flooring. He felt suddenly hot and weak. There was a flurry in his brain. He wrenched out the piece of wood he needed, stowed it roughly away in a torn capacious pocket of his old coat. Still on his knees, he gathered up his tools.

He rattled and banged things about,

trying to shut out other sounds . . . sounds on the stairs. . . .

The breath seemed to stop in his big body.

Creak. Creak. Creak.

It *was* someone cautiously stealing downstairs.

Crack!

He knew that sound. It was the broken step, third from the bottom. He tried to call out. It must be that damned oaf, Walter! The fool must have gone to sleep up there. Sanderson couldn't make his stiff dry tongue obey him. He couldn't hail whoever it was out there. He couldn't —he daren't.

His hunted eyes sought the window. Power to move, to jump for it, had left him. He knelt there, powerful shoulders hunched, hands on the floor for support, crouched like a big frightened animal. He fought to prevent himself looking over his shoulder at the door behind him. He *knew* it was opening. He heard stealthy fingers on the old loose knob. He heard the harsh scrape of wood on wood as the sagging door was pushed back.

Ice-cold wind blew in, rustled bits of paper and shavings on the floor.

Sanderson's head jerked back to look. The door stood widely open. His eyes, filmed with terror, focussed achingly on the gap between door and wall. Darkness moved there. A Thing of Darkness. On the threshold it bulked in shapeless moving menace. Darkness made visible . . . blotting out everything . . . blotting out life itself.

The crash of a small wooden crate on which his heavy hand rested saved Sanderson from fainting. He leaped for the window. Glass cracked and fell in sharp tinkling showers. A thick cloth cap protected his lowered head. He was through. He fell on the strip of trampled grass outside, among a tangle of ladders and buckets. He vaulted the pointed iron railing and was in the road—running—running—breath coming in deep sobbing gusts—deathly face splashed with rain and blood.

Ahead shone the cheerful red and white lamp of the *Three Mariners*. He went straight for it as a fox for a familiar burrow.

MR. AND Mrs. Burden—old Tom and old Mary to most—who kept the *Three Mariners* were sitting in their vast red-tiled kitchen before a blazing fire. Black hand-made rugs were spread. Oil lamps of heavy brass hung from massive black oak rafters. At a round walnut table covered with a crimson cloth, Mrs. Burden was working placidly through a pile of stockings to be mended. Solomon, a great tawny Persian cat, dozed with its leonine head on her instep. Mr. Burden, smoking a long churchwarden, sat in a wide Windsor chair glossy with age and use, his stockinged feet on a gleaming wrought-brass stool.

Doctor Dick sprawled on a settle near by. Two or three fishermen, warming up before the tide turned and they put out for their night's catch, completed the little company of friends.

They all looked up at the loud bang of the outer door. Every face was turned toward the kitchen entrance when Jim Sanderson burst in.

"For God's sake—a drink!"

He collapsed into a big chair and sat with head down on his hands, shivering and gasping before the hot fire. Doctor Dick was at his side in a moment. Mrs. Burden ran for a drink. Mr. Burden dropped his favorite pipe and stared. The fishermen sat forward, hands on knees, consternation on their weathered red-brown faces. Solomon stood with arched back, great feathery tail waving nervous-

ly, before seeking shelter under a distant chair to await developments.

Sanderson told his experience in jerks between sips of the *Three Mariners'* best Jamaica rum. His audience blinked, muttered, stared. Doctor Dick, that brilliant modern young man, listened with flattering and tremendous concentration, sea-blue eyes and keen face losing every trace of their habitual friendly good-humor.

Mrs. Burden sat immobile. She had, as always, a flavor of the wild, of a remote and more instinctive age, of ancient beliefs and wisdom. She moved like a feather in a draft of wind—so light, so frail, so incalculable. She always seemed curiously unrelated to furniture and rooms and human dwelling-places in spite of making the *Three Mariners* the coziest inn in the whole county of Cheshire. She had the quality of some clear deep peat-brown river, nourishing the earth and nourished by it.

Her husband, rocklike as she was fluid and quick, turned to her now.

"What d'yer say to that, old woman? That there Troon house was always what you might say queer-like. I reckon it's had queer folk in it and all. But I never heard tell of anything out and out bad."

"No? Well, I did, then."

Doctor Dick leaned forward, pipe in hand, his eyes bright as blue steel in the lamp-glow.

"Now this isn't treating me on the level, old Mary." He waved his pipe in reproach. "You know very well the vicar and I are trying to rake up Troon's past history. I've been here for the last hour and you've never let out one solitary squeak."

"No, and I wouldn't have done it if Jim hadn't seen what he *has* seen this night." Her bright dark eyes flashed round the intent faces.

"I've been thinking over that business you've been telling about, Doctor Dick, that skeleton Joe dug out of the walls last week. Seems like as if that must have been *her* skeleton."

No one contradicted this dark surmise.

"I'll tell you the story as my grandfeyther's grandfeyther wrote it. He was a scholar. Kept village school up at Keston. He'd got an old book with everything put down that happened since Seagate began. I read this story when I was a girl and never forgot a word. I can get the book from my uncle's niece by marriage that works in a big library up to London to prove I'm right."

Chairs were hitched up, pipes relit. Old Tom flung a log that roused the fire to crackling flame. Solomon emerged, paced majestically back to his mistress, stretched at her feet with his yellow chin supported on them.

"THE year 1600 saw Troon put up at the end of the parade, only a low sea-wall then. Course Troon was naught but a little tavern then: Troon Tavern. Even for those rough times it was a bad place. They had miners over from Flint across the water—dark little devils, those Welshmen, always scrapping and more handy with knives than a butcher himself. Mostly it was miners went to Troon Tavern. The man that built it was Thomas Werne, a Seagate man that got hold of money somehow. Smuggling, most like.

"Werne, the book said, was nothing but a black brute of a man. Treated his young wife wors'n dog. When she died he got downright savage, and the child, Lizzy, left to him, came in for it all. I'm not going to harrow your feelings nor my own by telling what that innocent suffered. Laws weren't much then when it came to looking after poor people's children.

"But there was a gentleman came to stay here at this very inn, the *Three*

Mariners, and he was that angry when he saw Lizzy and learned about her from Seagate talk, he threatened he'd have Werne put in prison. The gentleman went back to London after that and told Werne he'd hear more about it. Well, next thing that happened was — Lizzy Werne disappeared."

"Ah!" Doctor Dick's voice poignantly expressed his thought.

"Yes. Every one was certain sure Werne had done it, same as you're thinking yourself," responded old Mary. "But nothing could be proved. The body of the child, not much more of it than the bones Joe found, never turned up, search though they might and did! The law made a great fuss when it was too late. The gentleman from London came back and he stayed for weeks, he was that set on getting Werne hanged for murder."

"And he walled the child up in his own house, then!" Doctor Dick's eyes blazed.

"Aye. After three hundred years we've found what Werne did, I b'lieve!"

"Eh, think of that!" Old Tom spat into the red fire. "And what did the murderin' fellow say had happened to the child? What did he tell 'em?"

"Said she was drowned. No one ever knew whether or not she was, the tides being mortal quick and dangerous here at Seagate. An' 'twas worse then. There were quicksands down by the marshes, and more than Werne's Lizzy had been caught and drowned. No one believed Werne's tale, only nothing could be done to him because Lizzy's body was never found."

"Quite. What I don't see," put in Doctor Dick, "is why he walled the body up. After smashing her skull, why not have taken the corpse to sea and dropped it overboard one dark night?"

Old Mary shook her head.

"You mean he hadn't a boat?"

"No, I don't mean that, Doctor Dick. All the Seagate men had boats in those days, same as you and me have a pair of shoes. Reckon you're the only one here doesn't know why he couldn't put that body in the sea."

There were confirmatory nods all round the silent spellbound circle. Doctor Dick frowned in bewilderment.

"Why?"

"Well, seeing you don't know, I'll say the verse that was in the old book my grandfeyther's grandfeyther wrote out:

> "A murdered body cast to sea
> May never there lie quietly,
> But every night is washed ashore,
> And standing by the murderer's door
> It cries to be let in.

"Of course that's put in rime and it's not quite right about the tides, not being a high tide every night anyhow. But tide or no tide, the ghost would come back to the man who did the murder every night of his life."

Jim Sanderson shivered and looked with haunted eyes at the old woman.

"You reckon I saw her then — the ghost?"

"No such thing." She was emphatic. "You saw Werne himself, the black ugly devil as he always was. Better to warn you. Joe Dawlish, poor lad, did Werne a bad turn when he discovered those bones, and Werne was never one to let an injury go by, so the book said."

"What d'you mean? Are there two ghosts?" Sanderson put down his glass, turned baffled uneasy gaze to Mrs. Burden.

"No. There's one, and it's a downright dangerous one. The child escaped, thanks be! But Werne's caught himself now and he's going to make people suffer for it."

She turned to Doctor Dick.

"That padlock you told me about, with

the red marks on it. Magic that was, black magic to keep the child's soul a prisoner all these years. Sold her to the devil, did her father! Just so long as the child was prisoned, Werne himself was free."

Sanderson made an abrupt movement.

"I don't know as I get your meaning, old Mary."

"Plain enough. He'd sold his child to the devil, same as you'd bind an apprentice. The devil, he taught Werne how to lock her up safe so as her little ghost couldn't escape and go wandering round, making people suspect. Well, that spell was broken when Joe Dawlish broke the wall and the padlock and chain."

"As far as that goes," Doctor Dick's crisp voice interrupted the old woman's uncomfortably clear exposition, "the vicar and I are equally to blame."

"And Werne's not going to forget it," warned old Mary. "Now Lizzie's bones lie in the churchyard all safe and sound there'll be trouble—black trouble. That's how I see it, anyways."

Jim sucked in his breath on a long tremulous hiss. The fishermen got to their feet.

"Reckon the tide's right enough now," said one.

"Wait! I'll come along." Jim lunged clumsily in the wake of the retreating men. "You're going my road and I'll be glad of company tonight."

Old Mary's serious withdrawn look followed the group out. As the heavy outer door banged to, she shook her head.

"Jim Sanderson's in for it," she said in a low voice. "After sunset it's asking for trouble to set foot in Troon. He'll go like Joe Dawlish went. Poor fellow . . . poor fellow!"

THE next afternoon, Troon stood in a blaze of sunlight. The sky was mother-of-pearl. A slow full tide gleamed like gray satin. Troon confronted it—cold, indifferent, implacable.

Inside its strong walls an army of workmen went about like busy scurrying ants. They were desperate to finish this job. Work that would ordinarily have lingered on for weeks was being rushed through at treble speed. One week more would see painting and decorations complete. Even the long wilderness of a garden was being dug and planted and trimmed and sown at a pace contrary to all Seagate tradition.

Doctor Dick lingered outside the strip of grass and iron rail protecting Troon's tall front windows on the ground floor. Lynneth had told him she was coming with the Kinlochs about three o'clock this afternoon. Elaborate juggling with his day's program brought him to Troon on the stroke of the hour.

"Afternoon, doctor!"

A joiner called Frost touched his cap. He carried a big woven basket of tools over his shoulder. His face looked bleached. He glanced back over his shoulder as he stepped from Troon's front door and blinked in the clear light outside the house.

"Knocking off already?"

"Aye, sir. Not worth going to fetch more tools for half an hour."

Doctor Dick stared. Laughed.

"You don't mean your day finishes at three-thirty, Frost? I envy you."

"There's none of us works *there,*" he jerked a backward thumb, "after three-thirty, sir. Not these short days. All on us goes at three-thirty—before dusk," he added with significance.

"I see. How do you square that up with regulations?"

"We begins at seven 'stead of eight o' mornings, sir. That's how we does it. The boss is agreeable so long as we does a regular day all told."

"Leave before sundown. Yes, I see."

"We've got good reasons for it."

"I believe you."

"Aye. Not a man would stay in Troon after dusk. No—not for a ransom, not since Jim Sanderson went. A cruel death! Went like Joe Dawlish—just the same."

Seeing the doctor's grave expression, Frost began again.

"Mark my words, sir, if them two iggerant foreigners—if you'll excuse me putting it so bald-like—wot are renting the bungalow over by the marshes——"

"Mr. and Mrs. Kinloch?"

"Aye. If them two move into Troon next week, all I say is they'd do better to go down marsh-walk and be drowned comfortable. Might as well die natural deaths like! That's wot I says and wot I sticks to."

Doctor Dick took this with gratifying seriousness. He went to his car and fiddled about with it for a minute or so to gain time, then returned with a thought he appeared to have found under the car's bonnet.

"Look here, Frost! Believing in anything makes it real. If the Kinlochs have no faith at all in old Werne and his power to hurt them, well, perhaps he can't."

Frost poked his head forward like a turtle emerging from its shell.

"Noa," his north-country accent marked strong emotion, "I doan't hold wi' thot and thee doesn't neether, Doctor Dick! Thot oogly Thing a-grinnin' and a-murderin' there in the dark like, it's naught to *it* what we b'lieves! It just bides quiet —same as a beast or summat — and then——"

The man's gesture, brawny fist smashing downward, was eloquent.

Other workmen began to emerge from Troon. They mounted a fleet of bicycles leaning up against the iron railing and made for home and tea. Doctor Dick frowned. Surely the Kinlochs wouldn't —yes. There they were.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Thornton. Oh, I mean Doctor Dick—it's *so* difficult to bring myself to say that. In town, of course, one's so much more formal. D'you remember Doctor de Tourville, Alice? Imagine if we'd called him Doctor Henry! Of course he was really a consultant. A very big man. A personal friend of ours."

Doctor Dick let Edith's flow gush right over his head. She'd thought out her speech carefully in order to make two distinct impressions; first as to his regrettable lack of professional dignity, second as to the standing she and Alec had enjoyed in Liverpool. She saw him turn to Lynneth. His rising color she attributed to having got home with her two little stabs. It was always inconceivable to Edith that anyone could just ignore her. She gave them credit for ordinary intelligence.

"You're not—not going over the house so late?"

Doctor Dick had eyes and ears for Lynneth only. Alec, on his way to the front door, turned back and surveyed the doctor with a dull eye of one whose liver is perpetually ill-treated.

"So late!" he echoed. "Late for what? Was old Werne expecting us earlier?"

He burst into a high-pitched laugh, disconcerting in a man of his size. Doctor Dick's glance went to the windows of the house before which they stood. He thought he heard a louder, gruffer laugh within—a workman, perhaps. Yes, something dark passed one of the bedroom windows at that moment.

Edith ran forward to the front door, all girlish abandon to take up her husband's witty remark. She lifted the knocker and gave a smart rat-tat-tat.

"We'll ask him if he'll give us tea."

She cast a glassy brown look over the shoulder of her ponyskin coat. Alec, fumbling for his key, laughed again, louder and longer. Edith gave vent to a selection of well-rehearsed "outbursts of merriment." Doctor Dick, alert and listening with painful intentness now, was convinced he heard a hoarse, coarse echo within the walls of Troon. It *must* be a workman—and yet——. As he stood there, wondering how on earth he was going to prevent Lynneth from following the two Kinlochs inside, a further shock assaulted his nerves. Alec was still clumsily rooting for his mislaid key.

The heavy front door swung silently, widely open without a touch.

Edith blinked, frowned, assumed a bright tone of playfulness.

"We *are* invited for tea!" she laughed. "I suppose the men didn't pull the door to. How careless! I shall report it tomorrow to the foreman. These country yokels! Oh, well, one must be patient, I suppose."

Alec followed his wife inside. Doctor Dick drew Lynneth back.

"Look here—no right to interfere with you and all that—but *don't* go in!"

Her eyes were fathomless, shining. In the golden dusk her vivid eager face had a transparent look, as if it were wrought glass, golden-tinted, exquisite, through which rare wine sparkled and bubbled and gleamed.

"I—but why do you ask that?"

"Because it's dangerous. It's deadly. Your cousins don't or won't believe anything against Troon. But I tell you the truth. The place is haunted. There's a devil in it."

She looked at him very straightly under the fine beautiful arch of her brows. She knew truth when she heard it. She trusted this man. More than trusted—much, much more than that. For a moment her whole heart responded. Her hands were gripped in his.

"Lynneth! Oh, my dear!" he breathed.

"But—but——" she stammered in surprize. "Is it like this—like this? To feel so sure, when only yesterday——"

The front door banged violently. For a second their startled eyes questioned each other. Then they rushed forward. They had no key. Doctor Dick plied the knocker. Lynneth ran back to the front of the house to peer through the long windows. She returned to Doctor Dick.

"It's all right. Alec's there. He's talking to Edith from the hall. She must be upstairs."

They looked together. Yes, Alec was there safe and sound. He seemed annoyed. Under the hanging unshaded light his face was unhealthily sallow and fretful. His head was flung back. He was talking to someone above, but no sound was audible to the watchers.

They felt a queer chill of apprehension. His side of the conversation seemed acrimonious, to judge by his expression. His frown became a sullen scowl. He turned from the stairway up which he'd been looking, jammed his hat down, stalked away. Next moment he came outside, leaving the front door open behind him.

"Too damned cold in there to hang about. Edith's as obstinate as——"

He scowled at them, pulled out a pipe, clamped strong yellow teeth on its stem, and began to fill the bowl. After a few puffs he relaxed. Recent and surprizing discomfort urged him to speech.

"Chill on my liver or something," he vouchsafed. "Edith insisted—well, you know what she is!" he turned to the girl. "Today's plans included a visitation here," he jerked a thumb inelegantly. "No consideration for my health—*must* go over the place. Doesn't matter that the house reeks of gas or something.

And colder than a tomb. Damn it all, if she must see it, she'll see it without my company!"

Lynneth stared. Never, no, never had she heard him come so near a criticism of his wife. Even when absent in the flesh, her mind ruled his, subjugated it to her opinions. He must be extraordinarily upset.

INSIDE Troon's heavy old walls, Edith went confidently to and fro, snapping on lights, snapping off lights, rubbing a finger on surfaces of wood, raising an eyebrow at a pile of tools and shavings in the middle of a bathroom floor, opening every door in order that air should circulate. The house seemed strangely stuffy, although windows and ventilators were all opened this mild day to dry up paint and varnish and new plaster. And how much colder it was indoors than out! A great golden sun flung a path of light across five miles of sea and sand. Its clear shining reached Troon's gray western face. Six tall west windows met the golden light—and repelled it.

"But how absurd!"

Edith stared about with indignation. Her high heels clicked smartly on wood-block floors as she tried another room. Her room, the room she meant to call her boudoir. The most perfectly preserved in the whole lovely house with its south and west windows, its beams, its old, old corner fireplace so laboriously restored.

"What have they been doing—idiots!" the toffee-brown eyes took on a glaze of anger. "I told them vita-glass in this room. Do they think they can fob off this gray clouded stuff on *me?* I'd make them come back and change it right away if I were in charge. I shall ring up the contractor tonight. The very idea! These country bumpkins—tiresome things!"

The windows darkened and darkened as she glared about her. So angry was she that a voice from the doorway behind did not startle her at all; it merely represented a person on whom she could vent her vicious mood.

At sight of the big hulking weather-beaten figure in stained ragged jersey and sea-boots, she let fly:

"You're not a workman here?"

The grizzled ugly head made gesture of denial.

"I'm Mrs. Kinloch."

The man stared, unenlightened by the great news. He was like some great dark bull with his lowered head and bloodshot savage eyes. Edith caught sight of the trail of leaf-mold, mud and dust that marked the intruder's path across polished flooring beyond the doorway.

"Look at the mess you've made. How dare you come tramping about here? Who are you?"

"Thomas Werne."

"Werne! Werne! Why, that's the same name as some unpleasant old man who's supposed to have lived here centuries ago! The one there's such a silly fuss about."

The man appeared uninterested.

"Well! You can go away—at once! D'you hear? Don't imagine because you've the same name as that creature that you've a right of entry to these premises. Be off at once."

He regarded her with a fixed glare. Abruptly he burst into a loud long hoarse laugh. It echoed and re-echoed through the hollow rooms. Edith drew up her thin person in disgust.

"Really!" She soliloquized without troubling to lower her voice. "Must be a half-wit. These fishermen are the limit. Unpleasant dirty animals. Phew! How dark it's getting. I wish I hadn't stayed after all."

Her glance took in the blank windows, frowned at them. It was almost like an eclipse of the sun, something so queer

and sudden and unnatural was in the gloom that spread . . . and spread.

She looked beyond the burly figure in the doorway. An immense skylight was set in the roof above the staircase. When she'd come up only ten minutes ago, clear strong light had shone down. She remembered thinking how well the oak-grain of the steep old stairs showed up after treatment. Now, a wall of impenetrable darkness lay behind the intruder.

Secret inadmissable fear lent a barb to her tongue. Baffled, furious, uncertain, she tried to assume the glacial manner of an aristocrat as she conceived one.

"I don't wish to get you into trouble, my good man, but unless you go—at once— I shall feel it my duty to report you to the police."

A noisy bellow answered her. "Report old Tom Werne, eh! Thot's a good 'un —a reet down dom good 'un!"

His great bulk shook like a jelly. Walls and floors and windows — the whole structure of old Troon seemed to strain and shake and quiver with his uncontrollable amusement.

She stamped her high-heeled shoe, so neat and polished in its crocodile renascence.

"Oh, how dare you! Impertinent—I shall send Mr. Kinloch back to speak to you."

She took a few steps in the gray gloom toward the darker gloom outside, and stopped short. Raging inwardly, she was forced to realize that she couldn't, she positively couldn't make up her mind to go nearer that unpleasant filthy chuckling old beast in the doorway. Should she throw up a window and call to Alec? It would put her in a perfectly idiotic light. Infuriating impasse! She hesitated, summoned her reserves.

"I shall certainly give you in charge," she began. "The moment I—I——"

She blinked, stuttered. Was she mad, or blind, or ill?

Through the windows, golden sun streamed in across the floor, long gleaming ladders of light upon the beautiful wood. The landing outside shone in a yellow haze of cross-lights from open doors on every side. The doorway was empty before her. Empty! The flooring beyond was bare of every trace of dust or leaves.

She stood shivering, spellbound in the quiet sunset glow. Downstairs a door banged like a gun going off. Heavy feet resounded on the red-brick yard at the side of the house. They echoed, died away, swallowed up in the green shadowy depths of the long garden beyond.

Released from a spell, she ran downstairs, out the front door, and pulled it after her with an angry bang. She poured out to the waiting three her recent experience. Gesture and phrasing harked back to pre-Lady Bountiful days. Doctor Dick recognized hysteria. Lynneth recognized that sub-Edith she'd always felt but never heard before. Alec did not recognize anything. He regarded her with mulish lack-luster eye.

"You would go over the house! You are so damned obstinate! Must have been old Werne himself you were up there chatting to."

Edith's laugh rose shrill in the cool winter dusk.

"I can believe the doctor might say a thing like that. But you, Alec! Really! What are we coming to!"

"That's what I think. Old Werne himself. I've changed my mind since I went in just now. Not been in such a funk since I was a kid."

"So you left me to face it!"

"I did *not*. You did all the leaving part. Skipped up the stairs and left me cold. And cold's the word, too. I told

you not to go. I knew something beastly was prowling round. Damn it all, you've got nerves of chromium-plated steel."

"Alec! How can you be so silly and so vulgar! Actually using language—in the public street—and to your own wife!"

The shock of it pulled her together quite effectually. She shot across the wide road and began to canter homeward. Alec turned to the doctor and grinned, a shamefaced but quite a human friendly grin.

"See you again, my boy. Looks as if you'd be needed at Troon to give us all nerve tonics and soothing-powders. Well —so long!"

He looked down at Lynneth. One of his more perceptive moments dawned.

"Better get a spot of walk after that scene, my child. I'll toddle home and see to Edith."

He lumbered off, a burly blot of all-British respectability against a sheet of silver water. Doctor Dick turned, eager, ready to make the most of every precious moment. The girl was standing with flower-like face entranced, lips parted, her whole attention absorbed.

"Lynneth! Lynneth darling! What are you looking at inside that horrible old house?"

She did not reply, did not seem to hear. She stood as in a dream, her hands gripping the pointed arrowheads that tipped the iron railing.

"What on earth——?"

He went to her side and peered in through dark blank panes of glass to Troon's lower floor. Darkness. Shadowy darkness.

Chill touched the leaping flame of joy in his heart. He put a hand on hers. She did not move.

"Lynneth! Lynneth!"

The shining of a street lamp showed her face clearly. It was smiling in happy wonder. She seemed intent on some marvel, some vision beyond the big blank window-panes.

He hesitated. Short of force he couldn't wrench away those small hands that clutched the iron railing. He put an arm about her shoulders, tried to draw her to him, but she did not yield an inch. Her slim soft body might have been one of the iron uprights of the railing. Her eyes didn't flicker from their rapt gaze.

He made up his mind, put out his arms to exert full force, to drag her from Troon, from whatever she saw inside its haunted walls. Abruptly she sighed, loosed her grip, faced her companion. Happiness and wonder in her eyes faded to disappointment, to sick misery.

"Oh, it's gone! The lovely, lovely thing! I can't tell you how lovely. But it's gone. It won't come back. Not now. But I'll watch for it again. I must see it soon again."

The man froze. His blood turned to ice. What deadly perilous thing had she seen? A trap—a snare had been set. For Lynneth—for Lynneth! Oh, God!

To all his anguished questioning she shook her head. Her eyes were sad, full of longing. Remote, distraught, she walked beside him.

"There are no words for it. I can't tell, even if I would. Clouds . . . clouds . . . and a new lovely world. I must go back there—go back——"

He shivered. A devil's trick. Old Werne had played a devil's trick to get her fast. She'd been afraid before. She would have been on guard. Now she only longed to be inside that cursed place, dreamed of it as a wanderer dreams of home.

Their precious hour together was a grim ordeal to him. She, withdrawn and silent, he sick with fear for her. And the end of the nightmare walk was as strange as any of it.

At the black and white gate of "Sandilands" the two took formal farewell. A rising moon lighted the dark road. On one side of it crouched the little bungalow, looking like a child's toy with its gables, and its fir-trees on either side of the straight formal garden-path. Opposite the odd little dwelling stretched a long meadow. Beyond lay half-drowned marshes—beyond them sand and shining pools left by the tide where sea-birds clamored in the moonlight.

Doctor Dick strode away from the gate. He hadn't dreamed such black despair was possible. A voice called him.

"Dick! Dick! I want you. Come back!"

Next moment he had her in his arms. So close, so safe against his heart, it seemed nothing could hurt her again. She put him away at last, laughing, tears gleaming in her eyes.

"What happened to you—darling—*darling?*" she whispered. "I feel as if I'd waked from a nightmare. Kiss me! Again! Oh, Dick, you do care after all."

"THERE now, Doctor Dick! Sit down and make yourself at home. It's a week since you've been in. What's worrying you, sir? Tom—a glass of sherry for the doctor."

The host, in blue striped shirtsleeves, apron girt about his beaver waistcoat, clattered off across the red-tiled room. Mrs. Burden looked with keen old eyes at her guest's shadowed face.

"Nothing wrong, so far?"

"No."

His monosyllable dropped like a stone into a deep well. "Nothing. And it's unbearable. The suspense. Waiting—waiting——"

He sprang up, paced to and fro in the leaping firelight, stopped before the quiet watchful old woman, his hands clasped behind his back, legs astride, head thrust forward. She met his searching look and answered his agonized unspoken question in her unhurried fashion.

"Aye. There *is* danger for the lass every hour she's there. But there's just a gleam of hope to my mind, too."

"For Lynneth! You think so? Why, Mary?"

"That great dark Thing at Troon seems as if it settles on one at a time."

He frowned, stared.

"Then, if so—if so—it's Mrs. Kinloch who's in the line of fire. I told you that she saw *him*—old Werne—and insists he was a drunken fisherman."

Old Mary was emphatic. "It was *him*. He came with the darkness that's part of him."

"Yes. Mrs. Kinloch admitted the darkness—at first. Went back on it later, though. Said she'd only imagined it got dark."

"She saw Werne. It's my belief she'll go next. Then you can take your lass away."

"But, good heavens! D'you mean I'm to wait until that devil murders Mrs. Kinloch?"

"What other way is there?"

Her calm matter-of-factness roused in him a sudden hysterical desire to roar with laughter. And after all, he had to wait! If that obstinate woman——

"I've asked her a dozen times to leave Troon. She's on the point of forbidding me the house," he admitted.

"Waste no more words," advised the old woman. "They'll take you nowhere. Your job is to save the lass. Never mind fretting over them as are blind and deaf as stones."

Old Tom returned and poured wine. Doctor Dick sat down, glass in hand.

"How about the servant lassies at Troon?" asked Mr. Burden.

"From Liverpool," the doctor said. "They've heard nothing so far. Dressed-

up town girls, too superior to be friendly with Seagate fishermen. They've only one complaint so far."

"Aye!"

"They say Troon's dark. Grumble about the windows—that the glass is always gray and clouded even when the sun's shining outside."

"Darkness. 'Thing of Darkness'—that's what parson called it the day he buried Joe Dawlish."

"Thing of Darkness." Doctor Dick rose. His face was drawn and stern. "Well, I must be off. I'm dining at Troon. A house-warming. I'll call in again after it's over. It's likely to be a house-warming that'll leave me cold."

The heavy door clanged behind him.

"He'll not come back *this* night." Mrs. Burden turned a solemn face to her husband. He sat in his favorite chair, drawing on his churchwarden. "Friday, 'tis! And full moon. And—I didn't tell Doctor Dick purposely—he's enough on his mind—but it's the anniversary of the day Lizzie Werne disappeared. It's written in that old book I told you of. December 2nd, 1636."

"You think old Werne'll——?"

"Aye. I think he will."

"You must excuse this picnic meal." Edith's eyes were ablaze with triumph. Hard bright color dyed her thin cheeks. "I warned you it would be a case of roughing it. The maids have done their best, but you know what they are!"

Four sat at the gate-legged table of Jacobean oak for dinner that night, the seventh night of the Kinlochs' arrival at Troon. Edith had worked like a beaver, had driven cook and housemaid before her whirl of energy like galley-slaves. The big gaunt house was furnished from wide shadowy attics to scrubbed and scoured kitchens and pantries.

Doctor Dick remembered the Biblical story of the man possessed of a devil, who swept and garnished his house. He remembered and shivered.

He made the reply his hostess expected of him. The well-appointed table, the gleaming silver and Wedgwood dinner-service chosen to harmonize with the house, the five-course dinner, the well-trained maids imported from town, were all elaborate and over-emphatic in perfection. Not the natural and dignified background of a well-bred hostess, but a show. Herself the blatant complacent showman!

"Alone I did it," her voice, manner, and conversation implied.

"You know," she reproached the visitor, "I really believe you're disappointed. I think I see—yes, I'm sure I do—a sort of 'I'd rather that my friend should die than my prediction prove a lie' expression on your face."

Alec intervened. He, at least, had the advantage of early discipline that had planted certain fixed rules of conduct in him. Doctor Dick looked ill at ease. He must be soothed. Hang it all! you didn't rub things in at your own dinner-table. Edith was a bit above herself tonight. She'd got her way. They were living at Troon. Things were all right too—at least—— He brushed away suspicion. Just an effect of lighting. He wasn't used to the queer old house yet.

"Noticed the fireplace?" he asked. "It's part of the original tavern. Sort of bakehouse. The whole inglenook, arches and chimney breast and the little iron door to shove ashes through, were covered up by a kitchen-range. Lovely old stuff that brick—three hundred years old."

Thankfully, the guest accepted the diversion.

"Makes a wonderful dining-room. That window too, I like the square panes—different from the silly imitations they

make. Set in that battered old framework it's—hello! Who's that looking in? D'you keep a gardener working at this hour?"

Edith glanced up quickly, wished she'd drawn the curtains after all. She'd decided, on such a romantic moonlight night, that the vista of garden enhanced the room's perfection. Impatiently she tinkled a small copper bell at her hand. No one answered it. She rang again, waited. No sound from outside.

Lynneth ventured a suggestion. She was in one of the strange dreamy moods that the doctor dreaded—moods that had recurred again and again since that night of her "vision," as she called it. Her dinner-gown of smoke-gray velvet with its gleam of gold thread, the jewel—*Tiger's Tear*—glinting tawny-yellow on her breast, the thick shining hair like folded wings about her head, all gave Doctor Dick a pang of terror and dismay. She looked unreal tonight, held in dreams, unaware of evil, of danger coming stealthily nearer as she slept.

"I think," the girl's voice was only a whisper, "I think they've gone away. Someone—came for them."

Edith's answer was sharp with vexation. "My dear girl, what an idea! Go away in the middle of my dinner party? Why? They don't know a soul here. Really, Lynneth! You look half asleep. You'd better go and look for them. It might rouse you."

Doctor Dick sprang to his feet. "No. Let me go, please!"

Edith raised resigned exasperated brows. He *would* behave like this. How irritating these unconventional people were! He seemed to think this *was* a picnic, after all. Taken her literally. So stupid! Spoiling the whole tone of her dinner. Now they'd all have to get up. She and Alec couldn't sit still and let a guest chase about the house.

She rose, stood with finger-tips on the table, lifted her chin, looked round from under lowered lids in what she knew to be a really compelling pose. Her Queen Elizabeth look, she termed it privately. More privately still, she was sure there was some strain of royal blood in her. Some ancestor of hers had been—er—naughty! Oh, she was sure. How else did she come by the profound conviction of her own superiority? She *knew* she was different—an aristocrat deep down.

"I will go myself," she pronounced. "I insist. The maids are my province, after all."

Lynneth was unmoved by majesty's withdrawal. She seemed to be listening to some far-off entrancing sound. The two men looked uncertainly at each other. Alec assumed a boisterous hearty manner.

"Drink up, drink up! Fill your glass, my boy, and pass the claret along. The girls are new to Seagate. Heard something and dashed out to investigate, I expect. You know how pin-headed they are."

MINUTES passed. No sound from hall or kitchens. Then came the tap-tap of high heels just overhead.

"Edith! Girls must've gone upstairs, not outside. I wonder——"

"We ought to go up, too."

Doctor Dick was on his feet. Alec, puzzled and uncomfortably disturbed by something he did not begin to understand, rose also. They made for the door. The doctor turned back, to see Lynneth sitting peacefully at the table, dreaming, indifferent.

"Stay there. Don't move from this room," he called back. "Lynneth! Lynneth!"

She responded with a vague absent smile. Doctor Dick followed his host with a last anxious look of love at the girl. A sense of mortal deadly peril

threatened. The whole house seemed growing dark and suffocating and evil.

A cry came from above. Every light dimmed, went out. Thick choking darkness muffled Troon from kitchens to attics. Blindly, Doctor Dick fought his way up.

"Where are you?" he called.

From the stairs above, he heard Alec's voice, muffled, cursing.

"What's wrong? What are you doing? Can't you answer me, man?"

"I'm trying—to—get down."

Alec's voice came thicker, fainter now. A stumble. Curses and sound of hoarse hurried breathing in the darkness above. Then there was a yell—the crack of splintering wood—a heavy body came slithering and sprawling down the stairs as if flung with immense force. It knocked against Doctor Dick as he was stumbling upward, and he fell too, slipping down until an angle in the wall stopped him. Winded, uninjured, uncertain what to do next, he called out.

"Lynneth! Lynneth! Are you all right? Can you find matches? I left my lighter in my overcoat."

No answer from the profound darkness below.

"Lynneth!"

A voice, a vague faint echo of the girl's clear tone, floated down from above, it seemed to him. He made his way up the steep narrow old stairs again. "Lynneth! Lynneth!"

EDITH KINLOCH, cinnamon-brown silk flounces rustling her indignation, pursued her search. The kitchens, the pantries, were ablaze with light. And the hall. And the landings upstairs. She looked quickly into the rooms on the ground floor. No one there. But every room was brilliantly lighted.

She stamped her annoyance. Was this some low silly joke? Had the two maids gone off for some reason, leaving on all the lights merely to upset her? But why? Why? There had been no trouble over anything. Later perhaps, when they knew she did not intend to get more help——

She ran upstairs. Here again all lights were on. Every bedroom door was flung widely open. The blood rose to her head. In a rage now, she went up the last steep twisting staircase to the attics, and once more found the same silly prank had been played. True the lights were less brilliant. Fifteens were good enough for maids to waste! They'd only read in bed and be late in the morning if she gave them stronger lamps.

She hadn't thought fifteens were quite so poor though. Why, one candle would give more light than these things. Must be faulty bulbs. She'd ring up and complain tomorrow. They seemed to be getting dimmer as she looked at them. One died right out overhead. The one over the stairwell. She'd turn her ankle getting down again.

But where *were* those fools of girls? She stalked across to the wardrobe. There hung the tweed coats they wore, and a lot of other clothes. They couldn't have run off. They must be in the garden. She'd go down and send Alec out to find them.

Lynneth would have to make coffee and serve it, to cover the gap. Thank heaven, they'd finished the last course, anyhow. She turned about on the square landing, a mere three-foot platform, from which the attics opened.

In the big west room a sound brought her head about with a jerk.

"Who's there? Is that you, Beasley? Parkes?"

A shuffle. A heavy tread. She went back to the room. A light clicked off in the room as she entered it. She wheeled with a little squeal of anger.

"How dare you——"

In the darkness, a blacker deadlier darkness moved. Held rigid in sudden cold fear, her eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom. The window stood widely open. No. Not open. She looked at the thing. No window or even frame was there. Merely a ruinous irregular break in the crumbling wall.

She went to it, dizzy, sick, her nostrils filled with dusty choking stench. Her eyes followed the swelling shapeless Thing of Darkness that moved in the moonlit darkness of the room. A sudden red light shone from a foul little lantern that stood on a stone shelf formed by the chimney-breast's irregularities. Bare crumbling brick, the chimney was.

"But this"—she spoke aloud in hoarse amazed voice—"this is what it was before we restored it. This isn't *our* Troon!"

"No. It's mine."

Loud voice and louder laughter answered her. She recognized them. In the smoking lamplight, she saw the vast ugly bulk, the bloated face, the small cruel eyes set under matted hair.

"You! You here again! I thought I told you——"

Her voice died. Her cold hands flew to her throat. She pressed back—back against the dirty old wall behind. The other attic was darkened now; her frightened eyes glanced across to it. She was up here in the dark, shut up with this brutal mad old man. It was a trick! Those servants! She'd have them punished. A monstrous experience! How dare they let her be subjected to it! Ah!—he was moving nearer—nearer—darkness, thick black choking darkness, rolled forward like a tidal wave.

Now it touched her. She shrieked. Ice-cold, wet, like rotting slime, it touched her—closer about her—closer! Backward she went before the stifling death—back to the gaping ruinous wall. If she could get to that—call for help! Yes! Yes! She was on her knees on the dusty uneven broken flooring. With desperate effort she twisted, thrust her head outside.

"Help! Help!" she shrieked. "Help!"

The word choked in her throat. She was drawn back, as if the room were a quicksand into which she sank — down — down — silken flounces ripped — hair fallen all about her face of idiot terror —down—down—through the door of life—down through hell's dark gates—down—down—the Thing of Darkness pressed closer—closer still. . . .

It seemed to Doctor Dick, fighting his way in the unnatural darkness, as if he struggled up through clouds of poisonous gas whose fumes took strength from his limbs, sight from his eyes. Gasping. Dragging himself up one stair at a time. A cold numbness invaded him.

Then a frightful bubbling shriek pierced his senses. It came from above. Another—and more horrible cry. He groaned. He *couldn't* hurry. He felt consciousness being blotted out. Darkness pressed on him like solid walls. A stench of rotted decay filled his nostrils, choked the breath in his throat . . . it failed him . . . he fell forward.

Darkness flowed over him like the river of death itself.

He opened his eyes to find himself lying on the stairs just below the first-floor landing. Electric lights winked on all sides. Gray dawn met his aching bewildered eyes through a vast skylight overhead.

He tried to think, to remember as he struggled to rise. How had he come there? Why did such heavy desperate weariness weigh him down?

Sick, trembling with effort, he stood clinging to the baluster-rail. Below, under the glare of a droplight, he caught sight of a man sprawled untidily across a

glowing Persian rug. Groaning, he stumbled down to investigate.

It was Alec who lay there. Doctor Dick's professional instinct pricked him from lethargy as he examined the man. "Broken leg, slight concussion," he murmured. Suddenly full recollection flashed in his clouded mind.

"Lynneth! Lynneth!" he called aloud.

He made for the dining-room where he had left her last night. The place was deserted. Lights gleamed dismally in the half daylight. The dinner-table's bravery of silver and glass mocked his distraught gaze. He searched the lower rooms. No one.

He passed Alec as if he'd been part of the hall furniture, and went upstairs. Lights burned everywhere. The air was chill but clean. Empty room after empty room greeted him vacantly. Only the last narrow stairs now to the wide attics above.

"Lynneth!"

He sprang up the topmost flight, and crouched beside the crumpled heap of gray velvet.

Her dark head was against the wall, blood stained her face, her soft white neck, the bosom of her dress. The *Tiger's Tear* had fallen back against her parted lips—gleaming golden bauble.

Wild meaningless phrases shot into his distraught mind. Bits of Ecclesiastes: "The silver cord is loosed . . . the golden bowl——"

He touched her, bent closer. Ah, it was not death after all! Not death. He was all physician now. The healer. Dare he lift her to examine further? That head-wound was very deep—blood still welling. His eyes grew cold with fear once more as he explored it. The skull was crushed at one place. How could he move her from that awkward corner? It would be fatal to jolt her wounded head.

He hesitated only a moment. He must do it, of course. He daren't leave her alone in Troon while he got help. And every second counted. If ever he thanked heaven for his strength, it was now. When, with infinite care, he'd laid her down at last on a bed in the nearest room on the floor below the attics, he went to the bathroom.

From an elaborately fitted-out medicine chest there, on which Edith had greatly plumed herself, he dug out what he could. Gray dawn brightened to day as he fought to save Lynneth. He used what makeshift medicaments he had. Dark hair he'd cut away was strewn on a pale costly rug beside the bed. The girl's face looked carved from frozen snow beneath its bandages. Her pulse beat ominously slow beneath his touch.

Her life hung balanced by a thread, and he watched with increasing fear. She must lie undisturbed now for another twenty-four hours at least. There was a slim, a very slim chance of life—no chance at all if she were moved.

But there was another night to face—another night at Troon. How could he protect her? What weapons could a man use against the Thing of Darkness? Brooding, pondering, dazed with the terrible strain of the past hours, he sat. A creaking sound startled him. Light as a cat on his feet, he was up and out of the room in a moment.

It was Mrs. Burden. She was coming upstairs. He took her hands, kissed her withered cheek, tears of relief in his eyes at sight of the old woman's calm face and faithful eyes.

"You're a miracle. No one in the world but you would have come. Now perhaps——"

He poured out in brief hurried whispers what he'd seen and heard last night.

"Servants gone. Kinloch's smashed up. Edith Kinloch's gone. I couldn't look for

her. I daren't leave Lynneth alone for a minute in this house."

"Best look now, sir. I'll bide with your lass."

She settled down beside the patient like a little brown bird, watching the unconscious girl, taking in the room with clear thoughtful old eyes.

Doctor Dick went upstairs to begin his search. She heard him coming slowly down at last; heard his heavy breathing as if he carried some awkward weight. He had to pass the open door of the room where she sat. She saw what it was he carried.

Its broken neck revealed what once had been a human face—now a darkened dreadful mask. A few tattered wisps of silk clung to the broken body. Jeweled rings glittered on limp and dusty hands.

Doctor Dick passed on, went into a room near by. When he came in to her again he looked like an old man. His sunken eyes, his parchment-colored face, his unsteady lips brought her to her feet with a smothered cry of pity.

"You saw—it?"

Mrs. Burden nodded solemnly.

"Wait here, sir. Coffee laced with brandy is what you need. We'll talk when you're better, my lamb—sir, I mean—begging your pardon!"

"Wait!" His hoarse voice detained her. "There's Kinloch, poor chap! Must see to him. Help me lift him. I don't think he's seriously hurt."

"THERE's no way out. We've got to spend this coming night at Troon. The chances are we'll go"—Doctor Dick made a gesture to the bedroom across the landing—"like . . . that!"

"No. Not like that. Whatever comes, not like that. It's true, as you said, 'tis no good letting any other body come inside this place. 'Tis for you and me—this night's work. No one else can help. Even the vicar himself couldn't. 'Tis for you and me. But no one of us will go—the way *she* did! No. If we have to die, I can take the three of us an easier road than that."

Day faded. Its last gold shone above the distant hills. A gleaming path lay across the water. The gold dimmed, and died. Darkness began to fall. Shadows thickened within the walls of Troon.

Mrs. Burden got up from her chair, beckoned the doctor to the door of Lynneth's room, spoke to him there in a low urgent voice.

"You must leave things to me from this hour on. Keep your door fast bolted inside. Don't open it, not even if you think you hear my own voice call. 'Twould be a trick of old Werne that—to get you out of here. For God's sake, Doctor Dick, heed what I'm telling you. Stay inside until daylight comes. Bide with your lass here, if you want her to live, and want to live yourself."

"If you'd only tell me what you're up to, Mary! It's horrible to shut you out, to leave you alone—with that devilish thing."

"Eh, haven't we talked enough o' that? All the day long you've argued wi' me, Doctor Dick, and I tell you my mind's made up. I'm old, too old to fear death. And I know things—things I can't tell you, sir. They call me the Wise Woman. And so I am. Go in, sir! Bolt the door—*and leave it fast till daylight.*"

MOVING with sure unhurried purpose outside the bolted door, Mrs. Burden went to and fro among the shifting looming shadows. She had all prepared. She made no mistake.

There was only one way to shut out a damned soul. The cross itself. A cross of living flesh and blood.

In the wood-frame of the door, outside, four great hooks had been screwed

in by Doctor Dick that day. Iron hooks that Mrs. Burden had brought prepared for her purpose, two at the top corners of the cross-piece, and one on either side of the door. From these hooks she hung four plaited loops of hair and hempen rope—two long loops from the top, two very short ones on either side.

She stood with back against the door and slipped the long right-hand loop beneath her left armpit, and the long left-hand loop beneath her right armpit. Then, supported so that fatigue should not make her fall, she thrust her hands through the small handcuff loops on either side to keep her arms straight out from her body.

So she stood, a small light bird-like figure. Through the big roof-window, glimmering stars and rising moon showed her in the dusk, a human crucifix past which the Thing of Darkness might not go.

Facing Troon and its evil. Frail old body. Staunch strong old soul.

DAYLIGHT. Daylight, and Lynneth had passed the crisis! She was safe. Doctor Dick opened the door. The light worn body of Old Mary hung there still.

It was an empty shrine, too old, too tired to survive the night's long vigil and shock of battle—an empty shrine, but not marred, not touched by hurt or evil. The Thing of Darkness had left no shadow in the calm sightless eyes, no lines of terror or dismay on the peaceful worn old face; only deep exhaustion. A victor fallen at the goal.

A victor. Yes, Doctor Dick knew that. For long minutes he looked at the frail triumphant figure, assurance of her victory deep in his heart; giving homage to the dead, giving thanks for her divine courage.

His eyes, blinded with tears, lifted to see something else at last. A hulking black-haired man stood against an opposite wall. As the doctor stared, red sunrise dyed the skylight window above, touched the ugly brutal figure with flame.

It shrank, quivered. Its purple lips opened in soundless rage. Its dark bulk glowed like molten metal. White-hot . . . sullen red . . . dissolving . . . writhing . . . twisting in the sun's merciless fire to inhuman appalling decay—to a mere rag and wisp of a thing—to a shriveled black mummy that grinned in age-old death.

That too dissolved and was split like sand running through an hourglass. It lay on the jade-green Chinese carpet, a drift of gray dust, last grim symbol of mortality.

The shadow-life that Werne had bargained for was finished. Soul, will, poisonous hate were blotted out. The blackest magic could perpetuate his borrowed existence no longer. The deepest hell could offer no shelter for his furious ghost. Werne—Thing of Darkness—was no more.

But the old house still fronts sea and sky and hills. Troon—old Troon. Shell of death. Desolate. Betrayed.

The Abyss Under the World

By J. PAUL SUTER

An amazing tale about three men who were precipitated into a series of adventures as astounding as any that ever befell mortal men

1. *Fires of Death*

CHIEF OF POLICE Jim Kerns leapt down the front steps of Headquarters two at a time, then pulled up short on the sidewalk.

"Well, I'll be——" he began.

The tall, carefully dressed man who had stepped in front of him from around the side of the building, smiled ironically.

"Precisely," he agreed. "You will be—you will be, for certain—unless you are very careful. I have gone to some inconvenience this afternoon to offer you advice before it is too late."

"All right, Lefronti. What's your advice?" Kerns glowered into Lefronti's thin, rather handsome face, but the man who had waylaid him continued to smile.

"It is this" — Lefronti's expressive shrug revealed his French blood—"that you stop annoying me."

"Oh — then I *have* been annoying you?" Kerns could not hold back a slight grin of satisfaction.

"Would not any honest man be annoyed if he were suspected of controlling a great city's drug traffic?"

"How do you know I suspect you?"

Again the shrug—and the smile.

"Ah, how *does* one know things?"

"Look here, Lefronti." Kerns' hand descended heavily on the trim shoulder. "I want you to get this. I want you to get it so straight you can recite on it before a jury. That's what you'll have to do mighty soon. I've got a lot on you. I'm going to get more. And when I'm ready, you'll be wearing a pair of steel cuffs that'll fit as if they'd been tailored. Wait a minute." Lefronti had quietly turned away, but he paused. "Maybe you think my friend Daunt has helped me work this up. He doesn't even know I'm doing it. This is once I'm on my own, with no favors from anybody!"

Lefronti bowed. It was a graceful bow, but Kerns didn't like it.

"I am aware that the Reverend McGregor Daunt is not with you in this," he said. "As long as he remains out of it, no harm will come to him. You have my word for that. But as for yourself——"

"As for me, you're threatening me. O. K. You're not the first crook to do that."

"Threatening you? No, no! I have been talking about the weather. It should be dark tonight, do you not think so, since we have no moon? But for some of us there is always the morning to come!"

KERNS restrained an impulse to arrest Lefronti on the spot. An arrest would be premature, and very likely would upset everything. Yet, as he watched the Frenchman walk jauntily away, he wondered whether after all prompt action might not have been safest.

He was still turning that over in his mind, some hours later, as he hurried homeward along the dingy sidewalk of

Halsey Street. He recalled regretfully his assurance to Lefronti that McGregor Daunt was not connected with the case. His way led past Daunt's church. He could see a light in the reverend gentleman's study, back of the church, but since it was late, and he had kept his friend out of the "dope" investigations thus far, he walked on without stopping. Anyway, he felt, he needed to get home and soak up a little sleep.

But this was not to be Kerns' night for sleep. An automobile roared out of a side street just ahead of him. It skidded around the corner, careened giddily, and came on like a racing-car. Kerns was wide awake again. The gulp of amazement he gave almost ingested his quid of tobacco. It was Daunt's sedan.

Not only that, but Daunt's man-servant, Stubbs, was driving. He was unmistakable, even in the dark, to anyone who knew him as well as Kerns did. Stubbs was giving the big sedan everything it had—and it had plenty. It crashed past the church at eighty miles an hour or better. The chief had just time to notice that someone was sitting in the front seat beside Stubbs.

Kerns did not hesitate. He followed at

"Thou who art Yesterday and the hope of Tomorrow—I come."

top speed. Not that he expected to race Stubbs on foot, but there was a cab stand in the next block.

Recognizing the first cab in line and the driver loafing beside it, he vaulted in.

"Catch that car, Sweeney!" he said.

Sweeney whistled.

"Oh, yeah?" he commented, ironically.

But the cab jumped forward and to the middle of the street. He jammed his accelerator down, and glanced back over his shoulder at the Chief of Police.

"Daunt's crate, ain't it?" he inquired. "Maybe Stubbs is just trying her out a little."

"I saw his face—by the dashlight."

The driver caught something in Kerns' tone.

"O. K., Chief!" he said, and the cab plunged forward like a rabbit.

Halsey Street was clear of traffic. The tail-light of the sedan, several blocks ahead, twinkled like a red star. Then it vanished.

"Turned toward the river," diagnosed Sweeney.

"Streak after it," Kerns ordered.

"What's that in the sky?" Sweeney asked. He drove with one hand, his foot squeezed to the floor-boards, but found time for conversation. "Must be a fire."

A distant clanging forestalled Kerns' reply—a fire-truck on an adjoining street. Far away, a siren screamed. The cab's brakes squealed at the corner where the tail-light had disappeared. More gongs ruptured the stillness of the summer night.

As the cab turned right, Sweeney became excited.

"The whole town's on fire!" he shouted.

"One of the big houses by the river," Kerns shouted back. "Give her everything, Sweeney!"

"There's the car—on ahead. He sure *is* going to the fire!" the driver yelled back.

The blazing house was huge—an ancient mansion built on the river front in days when merchants lived near their business. It made a giant blow-torch, with flames cutting into the black sky. The windows leered red, and spouted fire.

The sedan pulled up in a ditch. It almost overturned. Stubbs and his companion leapt out and ran straight toward the burning house. The fire-trucks were still behind them.

"Park back of him," Kerns ordered.

The taxi-driver laughed — with a slightly hysterical note.

"Where d'ye think I'd park? Say, what's that with him—the thing that was in the front seat? That ain't a man. It's some kind of a monkey!"

Whatever it was, it ran fast, yet with a curious zigzag motion, and its long arms dangled. It flung open the gate in the old-fashioned fence surrounding the mansion, and made for the flaming door. Stubbs followed. As they got inside the yard, both protected their faces with their hands.

Kerns dashed up to the gate. A policeman stood there, uncertainly, his right arm shielding his face. The rest of the crowd kept their distance.

"Chase 'em, Walsh, chase 'em, you fool!" Kerns shouted. Then he realized that the heat inside the fence was too great to be endured. But Stubbs and his companion had plunged into it. He shielded his own face, and followed them.

THE monkey-like creature hesitated. Flesh and blood could not pass that gaping front door. Kerns shrieked Stubbs' name, as he forced himself forward. But the man-servant did not look around. Instead, he followed the lead of the other, who suddenly swerved to

the left and scurried through the lurid side yard toward the river.

The Chief of Police raced after them. He was able to give the house a wider berth, so the heat was not quite so great. But he found that the zigzagging creature ahead could out-run him. Stubbs kept just behind his companion. They both reached the river exposure of the flaming mansion before Kerns could make them hear.

With a start of horror, he guessed where they were going. The wind blew away from the river. It carried the writhing tongues of fire over the house and toward the city. That left the rear door free. Its broken lights gaped vacantly, with a dull pulsating flash visible through them, but no flames reached out.

"Stubbs!"

Kerns screamed the name. His powerful voice must have carried even above the furnace roar from the house. He called again, running now with head down and watching between arms folded in front of his face.

The misshapen creature Stubbs was following smashed against the door. It opened. He went through. Stubbs glanced back. He made a motion which might have been meant for a signal. The next instant, he too was through. As he disappeared into the reddish dark, he staggered.

Kerns charged at the door. In cold blood he could not have done it. His foot was on the sill when, with a sodden roar, hell seemed to come up at him from inside. The fiery puff of flames and sparks blew him back into the yard. There powerful arms caught and dragged him still farther back.

"No use, Chief," said the fireman who had him. "That was the floor going. The roof will be next."

"Stubbs is in there!" Kerns was close to sobbing.

"Then he's a goner. You can't do a thing."

Kerns turned and stared into the man's face. It was Clancy, of Number One.

"A goner?" he echoed. "It's Stubbs. You know him—Reverend Daunt's man."

The fireman nodded.

Then Kerns realized. He was free from any serious burns himself—miraculously free. He walked back through the side yard to the street. There Clancy delivered him to the waiting taxi-driver.

Kerns stared at Sweeney for a moment in silence—as he had stared at the fireman. At last he said:

"Daunt's."

2. *The Waters Under the Earth*

In the book-cluttered study at the rear of his city church, the Reverend McGregor Daunt had been sitting for three days—the three days since the fire. There was brilliant sunshine outside. The west window, opening on a broad courtyard between the church and the back of a tall office building, let in the golden light. But the little clergyman sat unheeding at the study table, his broad forehead buried in his hands.

When a minister who happens to be a bachelor is also wealthy, an authority on Egyptology, and a distinguished amateur detective, he is likely to be an eccentric, too. Eccentrics as a rule have few close friends. Daunt had Kerns and one other—his squat man-servant, Stubbs. And Stubbs was gone.

For the three days he had soaked himself savagely, desperately, in his Egyptian lore. That, he felt, was a good way to forget. Volumes wrenched from the shelves lay where they had been flung as he finished with them. Unopened packages of others blocked the floor. What little food and sleep he had taken had been there, at his study table. The remote

past, perhaps, might blot out the present. Yet it did not.

Abruptly, he changed his tactics. It was the afternoon of the third day. He jumped to his feet, kicking over a pile of books, and rushed out to the sidewalk. He had not paused to put on his hat.

Kerns met him just outside. That was hardly a coincidence. The chief had made thirty visits to his friend in those three days.

"Hold on, Reverend!" Daunt had walked past him unseeing. "Where to?"

Daunt glanced at him with a start of recognition.

"The river front," he said.

Kerns fell in step beside him.

"Now, listen, Reverend. You won't do any good going there. We've been over the ruins with a fine-tooth comb."

"You didn't find him." Daunt had not slackened his steady stride. "I should have gone before. I shouldn't have taken things for granted. I should be there now."

"Reverend, I hate to tell you this. But you've got to know the truth. Right after I saw Stubbs go into that house, there was an explosion that nearly carried me off my feet. He *can't* be alive. If there was any hope, I'd be the first man to say so. You know that."

"Who owned the house?" Daunt demanded, quietly.

"Lefronti—the 'dope king'—the fellow who threatened to get me. We can't find him, either. That's another queer thing."

"Does it strike you, Kerns, that there is something exceedingly queer about this whole business?"

Kerns stole a sharp glance at the plump little man beside him. He was relieved to see a glint of the old questioning expression in the somber eyes. He had begun to fear that the shock of Stubbs' tragic death—Stubbs, the friend and associate of years—had been too much for even Daunt's well-balanced mind.

"It certainly does strike me that way, Reverend," he responded, heartily. "I've been thick with Stubbs a long time—not as long as you, of course, but I'll bet it's ten years; and I've never known him to lose his head. He was always ice when the rest of us were burning up."

"Yet you saw him rush into a burning building, for no apparent reason?"

Kerns nodded, almost with a smile. This was the old Daunt speaking.

"You said it was a brick house. Are the walls standing?"

"They're standing."

"Clear everyone out. You and I will search by ourselves. After that, it may be——"

He hesitated, looked toward the gaunt remains of the big house—they had turned the last corner, and it was a short block away—then finished:

"——it may be I shall be satisfied that Stubbs is dead."

Kerns called aside the policeman on duty outside the ruins, and received a prompt assurance:

"No one in there now. They called off the search till you got back."

"Then keep 'em out," Kerns ordered. "All right, Reverend. You're sure you want to go through with this?"

THE little clergyman nodded. He was the first to step within the enclosure of the blackened but still firm walls. The floors and the roof were gone. He had to drop to the basement level. There he and Kerns walked about on piles of debris through which peeped the occasional dull white of stone flagging.

"We did a careful job, Reverend. Every last one of these piles has been turned over."

Daunt was tramping heavily from one

charred heap to another. He peered down at them. Some he studied on hands and knees.

"What's this?" The clergyman tested with his foot a part of the bare flagging which seemed to give slightly. Then he jumped on it with his full weight.

"Look out, Reverend!"

Kerns shouted the warning, and flung forward, with something like a football tackle. He was too late. One of the bare flagstones turned under Daunt's weight. He shot downward through it, as if through a gallows trap.

Kerns could not save him. But Kerns could follow. Before the tilting stone had time to snap shut again, he was through. He landed beside his friend. Above them came the crash of the stone swinging back to its position; then darkness.

Daunt had lighted on hands and feet. He straightened up, unhurt.

"A fool's trick!" he said, calmly. "At my age one should show better judgment. Have you your flashlight, Kerns?"

"No," said Kerns, shortly.

"Then possibly we had better shout."

"You're darned right we'd better," the Chief of Police agreed. "Don't be afraid of busting your lungs. Now!"

It was a worthy effort, but Kerns was not satisfied.

"Put your back into it this time, Reverend," he urged. "I don't like this place. I want out!"

"No use," Daunt commented, as they stopped for breath.

"Guess you're right. They wouldn't hear us in a year. We couldn't pick a worse place to yodel from. Why in hell did I forget my flash? Now we'll have to wait till somebody gets to wondering about us, and starts to look. And I told 'em we didn't want to be disturbed!"

Daunt blinked into the darkness. "See any light, Kerns?"

"Not a ray."

"Suppose you walk in various directions. See what you can discover about this place. I'll remain here."

Kerns was a man of action. With the mere prospect of something to do, his spirits rose at once. His voice came promptly out of the darkness.

"Here's a wall," he announced. "Maybe we're in a room of some kind. Keep facing the same way, Reverend. I'm on your left now."

"Correct," Daunt agreed.

"I'm feeling my way along the wall. It's getting wet. I'm splashing!"

"You are directly behind me."

"Right! That gives me my bearings. This water isn't deep. Here's a corner. Wait a minute." His footsteps splashed slowly and cautiously. "It's a tunnel," he went on, excitedly. "Must be about four feet across. I've spanned it with my arms. I'll keep going, and see whether any other tunnels open up."

Shortly his voice came from Daunt's right; then from in front; then from the left again.

"We're in a room, all right, Reverend —a round room. Not very big. Has a tunnel opening off it. I'll start down the tunnel. If the water gets too deep, I'll turn back."

"We'll go together," Daunt said, decidedly. "You can lead me. Then if you slip into a hole——"

"O. K. Let's go."

Daunt slipped his small, plump hand into the chief's bear-like grip.

"Easy, now, Reverend."

Their feet splashed. The water was ankle-deep. There was slippery mud beneath. Kerns slid twice, and recovered himself with earnest profanity. Daunt seemed surer-footed.

Suddenly, Kerns stopped short, with a sharp catch of the breath.

Daunt sensed it at the same moment.

He bent, swiftly. It was a human body—human, but pitifully misshapen.

"The monkey!" Kerns exclaimed.

"It is not a monkey."

"Sure, I know. It's the thing we took for one. Can you feel the heart, Reverend?"

Daunt's skilful fingers were busy for a moment.

"Quite dead. Burned, I believe," he said.

They stood silent in the darkness. Then Kerns' practical nature took hold.

"Nothing we can do. No use standing around. Feel that water? It's getting deeper. The fire started off with an explosion. That's what the firemen told me. Something must have broken through then from the river bed into this tunnel. It began to fill slowly. Now it's coming fast. The room we fell into will fill as quick as the rest of it. Our only chance is to run like hell. Maybe there's a way out at the other end."

As he talked, he plunged forward, tugging Daunt after him. The water—colder now—rose from ankles to knees.

"Let's yell again," Kerns suggested. "Somebody may hear us—somewhere."

They shouted, with the full power of their lungs.

"Keep it up!" There was a high-pitched edge to his voice. "Want to die here like a rat? It's up to our waists, now!"

Daunt helped with the shouting. Otherwise, he did not speak. Kerns' strength pulled him on through the rising water. Using his free hand with a swimming motion, he strained his eyes in a hopeless effort to see; to see the least sliver of light. But the darkness wrapped them like a suffocating blanket. It seemed scarcely less solid than the water.

"Keep going, Reverend," Kerns encouraged him, cheerfully. He was master of himself again. "We're not licked yet. We can swim. We don't quit!"

They were swept off their feet. Daunt jerked his hand free, and struck out desperately.

Kerns' voice, at his shoulder, was still cheerful.

"Hate like the devil to cash in just now," it said. "You know, Reverend, I've been working on a case. Hate to leave it unfinished."

"What case?" Daunt tried to charge his reply with equal courage.

"Lefronti. Dope. Whole town's flooded with it. I'm trying——"

His words stopped short. A tremendous suction came suddenly from below. An incredible mouth seemed to have opened. Close beside him, Daunt heard a shriek of horror, hard to recognize as coming from Kerns' throat. He was sucked down.

His fingers, clawing vainly at the sucking water, touched Kerns' body.

Then an insufferable, even pressure, with a roar to it like the sea, forced his ear-drums inward. It filched the air from his lungs, squeezed his brain.

A cold hand seemed to cover his lips, his nostrils, his eyes, and force him slowly into oblivion.

3. The Death of the Touching Fingers

DAUNT opened his eyes. He shut them again at once, to steady himself. This could not be true.

But it was true; either that, or he had gone mad. For when he looked once more, he was lying, not in water, but in a narrow alley. He had been in thick darkness; now it was light. The buildings on each side of the alley were of a curious construction he had never seen before. He seemed to recall having read of buildings like them; he could not remember where.

He raised himself on one elbow, and became aware of a huge Negro, oddly dressed, who stood grinning at him. The Negro pointed toward the end of the alley.

"Well?" Daunt struggled to his feet. "Where am I?" he demanded.

The giant black man did not reply. He still pointed.

Then Daunt remembered—with a violent start. What he remembered was the meaning of the Negro's costume, the simple loincloth, tied in a distinctive way. The man must be masquerading. Nubian slaves, in ancient Egypt, dressed so. And now he recognized the buildings as Egyptian, too.

The little clergyman chuckled to himself. Of course, he must be dreaming! Well, he would see where the dream led him!

The Negro gesticulated once more toward the alley entrance, and made queer little sounds—the twitterings of a dumb man. Daunt nodded. This, then, was the next step in the dream—he must go out to the street which he could see beyond the alley.

He walked slowly. This was the most remarkable dream he had ever had, and he was enjoying it. He turned his head from side to side, like a country boy in a great city, to see the curious sights.

That was why, as he rounded the corner of the alley, he stepped directly into the path of three galloping horses, which drew a heavy chariot mounted with gold. He would have been trampled beneath their brazen-shod feet, had it not been for a miracle. The miracle was that the driver of the chariot, rising instantly to the emergency, leapt over the backs of his own horses, grasped the clergyman by his collar, and whisked him around the flying hooves and into the chariot.

"Well, if I do say so myself, sir, that can be my good deed for this day," said a familiar voice; an incredibly familiar voice, breathless though it happened to be at the moment.

"Stubbs!" was all Daunt could say.

"Not only that, sir, but look who's with me!" Stubbs responded, heartily.

Daunt looked. His eyes were clouded with the dust of his recent acrobatics, and the two figures beside him were clad in garments unlike any he had ever seen them wearing, but beyond question this was Stubbs in the chariot, and that was Chief of Police Jim Kerns beside him. Stubbs was deathly pale, but otherwise he seemed much as usual.

Daunt's expression must have been strange. It moved Kerns to laugh until his long face was purple. Stubbs was more considerate. Instead of laughing at his employer's amazement, he set out to allay it.

"I'll bet you think you're dreaming, sir," he ventured, understandingly.

"I am sure of it."

Stubbs grinned, and winked at Clyde.

"Let me ask you a question, sir. Supposing this to be a dream, where are you dreaming that you are?"

"In ancient Egypt, of course," the clergyman returned, promptly. "Strange how my reading of the past few days has come to life in my mind!"

"Any particular part of ancient Egypt?"

Daunt looked about him in the teeming street. The horses had been pulled down to a walk. His special knowledge identified much of what he saw. The stately, dark-bearded man in a long robe, who shot a keen glance at them from under heavy brows as he stepped aside to let the chariot pass, undoubtedly was an Asiatic. The jewels he wore were from the hands of Tyrian craftsmen. Their like could be seen in many a big museum. The man brushed shoulders with two Phenician merchants—Daunt could have sworn to them. They were

followed by naked Negroes staggering beneath the loads of their goods. The soldiers who walked haughtily in either direction were Egyptian, beyond doubt. Daunt laid his hand affectionately on Stubbs' shoulder.

"Stubbs, I know this is a dream. I know you are really dead. But it is good to believe you here for a little while. I should say that this dream city is Thebes, about the time of the Pharaoh Akhnaton."

Kerns' deep laugh cut in.

"You're going to have a jolt, Reverend, when you find this rummy place is real, and that Stubbs hasn't been croaked after all. But I guess it'll be a jolt you can stand. Give him the works, Stubbs. Tell him. Tell him about——"

THE horses, at the touch of Stubbs' guiding hand on the reins, turned into a great city square. Kerns stopped talking. He was not an impressionable man, but this sight silenced him.

Opposite them, yet at least half a mile distant, was the greatest building Daunt had ever seen. Its many-pillared beauty rose to such a sheer height that the top seemed literally in the sky.

"The Temple of Horus, sir," Stubbs said, reverently.

He reined in the horses and pulled over to the side of one of the broad, flower-bordered drives which wound through the immense square. His face was troubled.

"What's that starting out in front of the temple, Mr. Kerns?" he asked.

Kerns shaded his eyes.

"Chariots!" he answered. "A lot of them." Suddenly he gave a start. "I'd almost forgotten!"

"Guess I may as well tell you, sir," Stubbs said to the little clergyman. "All this sounds mixed up, I know. It *is* mixed up. Mr. Kerns and I don't know exactly how we got here, any more than you do. Maybe we were all knocked on the head or given a shot in the arm. But we both remember that they turned this chariot over to us and told us to drive through the city for a while and enjoy ourselves. It's a good thing I learned to drive the milkman's horse when I was a kid."

"They?" echoed Daunt.

"The guards at the city gate. That's where we found ourselves when we came to. They're the ones who told us the little we know about this place. They must have dressed us up in these funny clothes while we were unconscious. Queer you weren't dressed up, too. And they told us something else—just a nice, friendly little bit of information. It seems these people — whoever they are — don't like visitors. They kill 'em. But first they let the visitors drive around and see their town. One of the soldiers wasn't such a bad sort. He said that when we noticed other chariots taking after us, we should whip up our horses and drive like the wind. He hinted—it wasn't any more than a hint—that we *might* escape, if we had plenty of luck."

"Stubbs, where are we?" Daunt demanded.

The broad-shouldered man-servant slowly shook his head.

"I don't know, sir. I honestly don't. I rather gather, from what the soldiers said, that all this is under the earth—another world below ours that nobody ever knew about; one that connects up in some way with ancient Egypt. But I don't *know*. That's the truth."

"Do you mean to say this is *not* a dream?"

"I don't think so."

"They're coming our way!" Kerns declared, excitedly.

Stubbs whirled the big horses about with as much easy skill as if he had spent

the past ten years as a charioteer rather than a gentleman's gentleman.

"Hold tight, sir!" he said to Daunt. "Here's where Ben Hur starts!"

"And here's where he gets caught!" Kerns growled.

Stubbs had been leaning far forward, to whip up his horses. Kerns' tone made him glance around. Daunt looked, too—in the direction from which they had come. Scarcely a hundred yards away, another group of chariots was bearing down upon them. The horses were being urged on as quietly as possible by grinning drivers who hoped to take their quarry unawares.

The clergyman gazed about him. If this was a dream, it was getting very real. They seemed cut off from both directions. Very well, he had a suggestion.

"I don't notice any signs against driving on the grass, Stubbs," he said.

Stubbs grinned.

"They'll put up signs after today," he replied. "Giddap!"

The huge horses hesitated an instant. Then they leapt forward. Their hooves spurned the curb at the side of the drive, and drove into the soft turf of the ornamental park. Thundering after them, the broad, metal-bound chariot wheels splintered the edges of the stone that protected the grass.

An outraged yell from both bands of pursuers greeted the maneuver. But the chariot sped in a straight line across lawn and flowers. It cut through shrubbery, bowled over an exquisite little statue which Stubbs failed to see in time, took with it an occasional small tree. Stubbs let out a deep-voiced yell, and shook his fist at the following chariots, which were taking the long way around, through the drives.

"We'll make it, sir," he shouted to his master. "I'll bet these nags could blast through the city wall itself. This is the one thing those birds weren't looking for!"

There was the opening of a clear street ahead. He lashed the horses toward it.

Kerns groaned. Another band of chariots, with yelling, exultant drivers, was approaching down that street. And as this band reached the borders of the great square, half a dozen more chariots emerged from a street nearer the temple.

Stubbs pulled his horses up on their haunches. He glanced at the rapidly converging bands of pursuers. A slow grin puckered his face.

"We're not caught yet, sir," he said. "Look at the temple! Not a chariot near it now. That's one place they don't expect us to head for. All right—that's where we're going."

He brought the horses down again, galloping, at right angles to their former course.

"Come and get us!" he shouted, as a general invitation.

The chariot whirled forward over grass, flower beds, and curbs. Stubbs was setting a direct course for the great stone steps of the temple, to which all the driveways led. No doubt it was a course never before taken for that mighty edifice.

"What are they doing now?" he asked, as he lashed the horses.

Kerns braced himself against the swaying sides of the chariot, and looked back.

"They're talking it over," he replied. "Two of the bunches have got together. They're waiting for the others to come up."

"That gives us more time. We'll make this yet."

"What shall we do when we reach the temple?" Daunt asked, thoughtfully.

"We'll figure that out when we get there."

"Say, I don't like this! I don't like it

a little bit," Kerns said, slowly. "They've started after us again. Now they're taking their time. Why should they take their time, unless we're heading into a trap? That's what I'd like to know."

"You'll know, all right." Stubbs jiggled the reins, which seemed to squeeze a trifle more speed from the laboring horses. "You ought to know in about three minutes, if one of these plugs doesn't break a leg."

In less than three minutes they jolted down from the last curb and shot across the broad thoroughfare in front of the temple. Stubbs drove up to the very steps.

"Hold tight!" he yelled.

The powerful horses, given their heads and scientifically lashed, did not hesitate. They continued their mad career up the long, shallow flights of steps. They reached the first broad landing in safety. Stubbs laughed, and urged them on.

"I told you we'd figure out what to do, sir," he shouted.

They jolted up the last flight. Before them the broad temple doors were open on an enormous marble-floored room. Stubbs whipped up his team again. They swept through the entrance. Other broad doorways loomed ahead—a succession of them, like reflected doors in a palace of mirrors. Not a soul was visible.

"Shall we go on, sir?" Stubbs demanded.

"I see nothing else to do," Daunt replied.

On the glistening marble floors they picked up speed. The horses' feet struck sparks and beat a mighty tattoo. Stubbs shouted in sheer exultation as they flew from one enormous room to another, but his voice was drowned by the thunder of the hooves and the roar of the chariot. When they had gone through half a dozen doorways, the vista before them still seemed endless.

But Daunt was increasingly uneasy. It seemed incredible that this place, greater than the mightiest temple he had ever seen, and set in a crowded city, should be deserted. He kept glancing behind. At length he saw something ominous.

The last entrance doors they had passed were closing. They swung together with a ponderous jar, vibrated a moment from bottom to top, and came to rest. He was about to cry out when Stubbs, with an exclamation, suddenly pulled up the horses. The doors just ahead of them were closing, too.

"Trapped!" Kerns said, bitterly. "That's the one door big enough for us. Of course, we're being watched, too."

Daunt shook his head.

"This may be automatic mechanism," he suggested.

If Stubbs' high spirits were dampened, he was not showing it. He jumped buoyantly to the floor.

"There's a narrow door at the side," he said, pointing. "Come on, let's run for it!"

But that door opened. A tall, spare figure in a white robe stepped forth. He was some distance from them—this room they were in was as large as the auditorium of a church—but his low-pitched, deep tones as he spoke to them might have come from less than two paces away.

"You were kind to come so quickly to us," he said, with an ironic air of courtesy. "We had expected to await you longer. You arrived somewhat ahead of your escort of honor."

As he spoke, he walked slowly toward them, and his face became clearer. It was a striking face. There were no eyebrows—they had been plucked out completely. But that fact was unimportant. The cold brilliancy of the dark eyes redeemed whatever defects there were in

the other features. The lips were thin and cruel. From the high, bald forehead to the masterful chin there was no mercy in the face. But the man's power was evident in his eyes.

"I am Chandra, High Priest of Horus the Hawk-Headed." The thin lips spoke cleanly and evenly, as if intoning a chant. "You have been selected, as is usual with strangers among us, for the honor of testifying to his glory. Come!"

He turned, and began to retrace his steps toward the little door. Stubbs glanced at his master and at Kerns.

"Think we'd better jump him?" he inquired in a whisper.

The priest heard, and replied:

"The god in his vast compassion has granted you an easy passage to the Land of Shadows. Do not provoke him by violence. His patience is short, and he is master of all tortures known to men."

Kerns shrugged his shoulders. "I don't like it," he growled.

"We shall do best to follow peaceably, I think."

"Guess you're right, Reverend. Wait till we see what's on the other side of that little door. Then maybe we'll know what to do."

Again the priest seemed to have heard. He said nothing, but glanced back with a half-smile on his gaunt face. Reaching the door, he threw it wide, and stepped back for them to enter.

"Behold, then!" he invited.

They stood in silence, just within the doorway. At first, this appeared to Daunt to be a larger hall than the one they had just left. Then he perceived that it was narrower but longer. And it was not empty. The murmur of thousands of voices rose like the hum of a beehive; voices which swept to a shrill, expectant pitch as they entered.

"Look carefully," the priest said, in his deep tones. "We await your escort. They must have part in this. When you have seen, and while we wait, I will tell you the meaning of what you behold."

Daunt tried to adjust his eyes to the scene. At first, though he could hear the people, he could not see them. The only thing visible was a tremendous image of Horus, the Hawk-Headed, brooding and awful in the foreground. Its feathered head and cruel beak, the pitiless and drooping eyes, held his attention to the exclusion of all else. Then at last he saw that just beyond the idol there began a double row of people, both sexes, facing each other, with a distance of perhaps five feet between the rows. They were leaning forward against something, and chatting across the space which divided them.

"What are they leaning on, Stubbs?" he asked the man-servant.

"Looks like a gold railing on each side."

"That double row of people seems very long."

"Longest row I ever saw," Stubbs agreed. "And what I don't like about it is that I have a hunch they're waiting for us. I don't like that gold rail, either. That has something to do with us, too—you can bet on it, sir."

"But for that rail the people would kill you," the priest explained. He hesitated. "That is to say, they would kill you too quickly."

SOMETHING stirred in Daunt's mind; a remembrance of something evil and very ancient which he had known and almost forgotten. He shuddered, and darted a quick glance at the priest. The priest nodded, slowly. His face was grave.

"I see you understand," he said.

"What is it, Reverend?" Kerns asked, anxiously.

But Daunt was still looking at the priest, cold horror in his face.

"They are not going to do *that* to us?"

"That is their intention."

"What have we done to deserve such a fate? How have we offended?"

"It is the custom of the land."

"Reverend, why don't you tell us what this is all about?" Kerns whispered. The clergyman sadly met his eyes.

"I only hope, Kerns, that my first impression was correct—that this really is a dream. The preparations you see here are for a very ancient form of death by torture. Nothing of the sort has been known in our world for thirty centuries. You see the people? You see they stand in double files a few feet apart?"

Quickly the police chief nodded. His breath came rapidly and his jaw was set.

"We are to walk—or run, Kerns—between those rows. We are a sacrifice to their hawk-headed god. The idea is that each of them shall have a part in that sacrifice."

"You mean they've got weapons?"

"I wish they had. They use only their fingers—and the nails on their fingers."

"Will they tie our hands?" Stubbs asked. His tone was no longer jaunty.

"I don't think so."

"I'm going to fight!"

The priest spoke again.

"Those who fight make the better sport," he said, quietly. "There are many here—all the people of our city. If you fight—and fight well—more of them will have part in the sacrifice. I have known very strong men to run the gauntlet of a thousand on each side and lose only their clothes and their skin. One that I remember was actually in the fortieth thousand before he stumbled to rise no more. I saw his body before it was offered up—all his muscles were bare! He was a worthy sacrifice!" He glanced around. A silent company of priests had entered at the little door. "We are ready. Take my advice—do not offer violence to the priests. We have ways to revive you after the people are done, so that you may suffer anew. I shall be with you for a space. Walk abreast until you reach the gauntlet. Then enter between the rows in what order you wish."

They fell in beside Daunt. He and the chief walked with bowed heads. Stubbs' restless eyes were watchfully aware of everything: the high priest, marching just ahead of them; the company of lesser priests a little behind; the great evil image which they must pass, its base alone higher than their heads; beyond it, the eager populace.

Thus it was Stubbs who first perceived an incredible fact.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Jump!"

Kerns and Daunt saw it at the same instant. A great stone in the base of the idol had swung aside, disclosing a narrow doorway. The high priest stood near it. His dark eyes were gleaming. He was frantically beckoning to them.

In a moment they had leapt aside from the procession and plunged through the doorway. The stone swung shut behind them. They heard the low, even voice of the high priest, at their side.

"I do this from no love of you. But long ago a man of your world saved my life, as I now save yours. No one else has the secret of this door. Two springs are necessary, and one of them is far back in the pavement of the great hall. Come!"

4. *The Abyss*

For a space of minutes, Daunt forgot his companions. He was only dimly aware of the rocky ledge to which the priest had led them through vague and winding passages. Now here before him

was a scene so stupendous that it leapt his limitations of sight.

This was not merely a cavern on which he looked. A cavern would have had sides; this had none. The soft, silvery light pervading it extended in three directions without bounds—without even a horizon. Cautiously, he looked down. Some quality of the light strengthened his vision. He felt able for a moment to see to an infinite distance. But he saw only the rolling, luminous waves, like clear, transparent mist, as far as sight could reach.

The priest gazed at them, a cold smile on his sardonic face. His voice seemed hardly more than a whisper, yet it was perfectly audible in the intense stillness.

"Listen!" he said.

He picked up a pebble, which gleamed like quartz. Holding the fragment aloft for a moment until their attention was fixed upon it, he tossed it into the abyss. His white-sleeved arm remained upraised.

At last, he lowered his hand. "What did you hear?"

Stubbs answered: "Nothing."

The priest nodded.

"Some among us in our world are famed for keenness of ear. Through the centuries their line have cultivated that faculty. Yet none of them has ever heard the sound when a stone, tossed from this spot, has alighted. Our learned men hold that though there must be a bottom to the place, it is so remote that objects thrown from where we stand are caught in the whirling motion of the planet, to revolve with it for ever. This is the Abyss that was from the beginning and will be to the end."

Stubbs, standing near the edge of the dizzy chasm, looked over curiously. He glanced at the priest, to make sure that awesome person was not observing, then picked up one of the shiny pieces of quartz and threw it downward himself.

The priest turned. Smilingly, he held up his hand once more in the silence.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked, at length.

Stubbs nodded.

"It is well that you should test this for yourself. The journey you are to take calls not for ignorance, but for knowledge that the truth is past human understanding. Are your spirits free from fear? Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" Kerns demanded, hoarsely.

"For that which lies before you. Do not question me. Accept my judgment. You will be safer for not knowing."

Stubbs sidled up closer to his master.

"How about trying to fight our way back?" he inquired, in a barely audible whisper.

But the priest answered. Surely his ears were abnormally keen.

"You have no choice. The rocky door is shut behind you. Again—are you ready?"

Daunt glanced at his companions. He himself stood well back from the fearful brink, but Stubbs was still at the very edge. The tall Chief of Police was poised alertly, only a step behind. His right hand hovered close to Stubbs' shoulder, as if he expected the man-servant to overbalance at any moment, and intended to catch him.

"I think we are ready," Daunt said.

"That is well. Since the light endures only for a few hours, we should start at once."

"Funny light," Stubbs remarked, casually. "Where does it come from?"

"We do not know."

Slowly, the priest raised his hands in invocation over the abyss. The sleeves of his robe fell back from his lean, yellow arms. In the swirling, silvery light they gleamed like ivory.

"Horus of the Two Horizons; Ra, who closeth and who openeth; Osiris, great-hearted, thou who art Yesterday and the kinsman of Tomorrow; and thou of Fiery Face, who cometh out of Bast and whose motion is backward—ye Four, protect us from the Terror of the Abyss and the evil Powers therein. Grant safe passage to the unreturning."

His arms fell to his sides. From the folds of his robe he produced a coil of thin, springy cord. One end he bound about his own middle, over the robe. Afterward he looped and tied the cord around Daunt's waist, and in turn around Kerns's and Stubbs's. His hands worked fast.

"Come!"

DAUNT cried out, involuntarily. Not till that moment had he perceived the narrow flight of steps in the solid rock, which led downward from the ledge upon which they stood. Each step seemed barely wide enough for the feet of one of them at a time. On the left of the steps the solid wall glistened; to the right, the cliff fell away into space.

They followed the priest. Daunt looked to the right, and downward. Some of the swirling light-clouds below had drifted away. Between them he saw into blue and unimagined depths.

"Watch only the steps!" cautioned the priest. "Steady yourselves against the rock with your left hands as you descend. Keep facing the rock."

"Do you still think you're dreaming, sir?" Stubbs asked, mischievously.

It seemed to Daunt a peculiarly ill-timed question; but he did not have to answer. The priest replied, instead.

"Life is a dream," he said, in measured tones, without interrupting their steady, step-by-step descent. "Many have awakened from it by falling from these steps—and from the more dreadful place beyond."

They were now well below the level of the rocky ledge. His voice took on an odd booming quality, as if the rock wall had been an enormous drum, which reflected his tones into the abyss.

Daunt tried to keep his eyes on the priest's tall figure, and not to look down beyond the steps. Erect and sure, their guide walked crisply from each step to the one below it. Now that they were fairly on their way, he neither spoke nor hesitated, except that at one spot he shot a swift look at them, and said, composedly:

"Here it is steeper, but only for a few steps. Remember to steady yourselves against the wall."

Another moment, and the more gradual descent was resumed. Then Daunt stole a glance into the chasm. The silvery clouds of light twisted and billowed almost to their feet. Here and there a narrow pencil of gold pointed a path through the silver, as if the sun had found entrance through some rift from the world above. But no such opening was visible. Even the roof was hidden by the clouds.

A sudden little whirlpool of cloud beneath formed a tunnel to the depths. In the same instant it was gone. But it had revealed no bottom—only a distant deep blue, like the midnight sky.

The priest stopped and faced them.

"You have finished the easier part of your journey," he said. "Here, as you see, is a corner of the rocky wall. The steps skirt it, but your eyes cannot follow. After passing around it, you will have sight of the path which lies before you."

They shuffled around the rocky projection. Their faces were close to the rock wall, their backs toward the abyss. The priest kept his length of the rope taut.

"Turn now, and look," he commanded.

Even Stubbs found no words, but gazed in silence.

Their guide's even-spaced, ironical voice broke the spell.

"What you see is a curving spur of rock," he said. "It is ages old. When you walk it, there will be no rocky wall to steady you. There will be only space."

Kerns spoke. His voice was unsteady.

"Walk *that?*" he asked.

"There is no choice."

"Why——" he choked, but stumbled on; "it sways! It's trembling while we look at it!"

"It has trembled so from the beginning."

Daunt did not speak. The strange virtue of the silvery light, which seemed to make his eyes unnaturally keen, was potent at that moment. He saw the nearer portion of the rocky spur clearly. Just beyond where they now stood in single file, the flight of stairs ceased. The rocky wall continued sheer, minus the ledge. At that very point the spur swung out over the abyss, curved like a whip-lash, gradually narrowing as it plunged into the clouds of light. A continual tremor ran through it—the vibration from unseen forces moving somewhere in the abyss. The spur was perhaps twenty feet in depth. It seemed to taper on its under side to a knife edge, and there it was iridescent, like mother-of-pearl.

The priest smiled.

"This is the hour of its greatest beauty," he said, fondly. "I have seen its golden light shine on some as they fell. They were like the fiery arrows of Osiris himself, shooting into the abyss."

He pointed to their feet.

"Your shoes! I have let you wear them. The stairs are jagged in places. But the path you now tread is smooth and very narrow. Take them off—quickly."

"I'll take 'em off for you," Stubbs volunteered. "I can stoop without getting dizzy."

He did it neatly—knelt on the steps, unlaced Kerns' shoes and his master's, removed and laid them on a higher step. His own followed.

"It is well." Their guide regarded the six carefully placed pieces of footwear with a half-smile. "The vibrations of this place will force them over the edge before tomorrow, but what matter? You will not return for them. Follow me. Look only at the rocky path beneath your feet."

"It's impossible!" Kerns whispered.

The priest was already standing at the beginning of the swaying spur. He glanced back.

"You have a choice—to return by the steps and wait at the door that will not open," he said, coldly.

"We'll make it," Stubbs encouraged him, from behind. "We can always straddle the thing, if we have to."

The priest started forward. He walked slowly, with even steps. Daunt followed, then Kerns, groaning softly to himself; finally Stubbs. In a moment they were clear of the rock wall.

The width of the spur they were treading was hardly more than a yard—a yard's breadth of smooth rock, which bent up and down like a springboard and gradually curved out over the abyss. As they went farther, it began to slope downward at a slight angle. In the depths far below, the silvery light was shot through with gold. The glow mounted in swirling funnels until it reached the more distant stretch of the spur ahead.

The priest spoke, sharply: "We must hurry. The light soon will fail."

"I'm slipping now!" Kerns protested.

Stubbs pulled back on the cord.

"I'll steady you, Mr. Kerns," he said, cheerily.

His voice echoed back from the rock wall they had left, and sounded hollow. Still, it was jaunty and unafraid.

That part of the spur which was visible just ahead was narrowing. Its up-and-down swings dipped farther. After less than a hundred yards, it was obscured by the drifting light clouds. Daunt made a discovery.

"Does this spur twist back toward the rock?" he asked.

The priest nodded.

"Many have fallen before reaching the spot where you now are," he said. "A greater ordeal is to come. It may be you can survive it, if your spirits are strong. Look now through the mists. Do you see where the spur leads?"

"It can't be anchored at the far end," Stubbs suggested. "If it was, it wouldn't swing this way."

"Look for yourselves. The light clouds are clearing. Very soon now they will sink into the abyss and all this will be dark—darker than anything you know in your world. But for a space we shall see clearly."

While he spoke, the mist wisped aside, as if an invisible hand from below had reached up and pulled away a veil. The end of the spur was plainly before them. It did not reach the rocky wall. It swung free, several feet short of a tunnel in the wall, which was opposite the spur but a little lower. It was a springboard indeed —such a one as none of them had seen, even in dreams.

They had stopped. Now the priest led them on. He was hurrying. Almost at the swaying end, he paused again and turned.

"Once you reach the tunnel, the path to your world is straight and plain," he said. "But in case one of you should stumble at the brink——" His hands were busy with the cord around his waist. He untied it, and readjusted it around Daunt's middle so that the length between the latter and Kerns was greatly increased. "I need no cord. If you should stumble"—he nodded at Daunt—"these other two should be able to save you. Then you and I will tie the cord about us and brace ourselves for the tall man."

He glanced at Stubbs. "*You* need no cord, I think."

Stubbs grinned back, and shook his head.

"The way I'll be traveling when I take off, one of the cables from the Brooklyn Bridge wouldn't hold me," he said.

The priest's robe was kilted about his waist. He stood a moment on the swaying edge of the spur. Then he jumped—and landed well within the tunnel. Before leaping himself, Daunt looked back at Kerns. The tall chief met his glance with a smile and a rather labored wink.

"I'm so scared it doesn't bother me any more," he said, in explanation. "After this, a fellow can hold a gun to my head and I won't mind unless it tickles. Go ahead, Reverend. Kick up your heels. You don't want to live for ever."

DAUNT tried not to look down. This was merely a springboard—a springboard over a swimming-pool. He told himself that. He could dive well; this was easier than diving. He had merely to make a short leap to the spot where the tall priest awaited him. But at the last instant, his eye turned downward to the purple depths. He began to slip sideways.

"Jump, sir!"

It was Stubbs. Daunt jumped.

He lighted safely. The priest calmly readjusted his cord. Back on the swaying spur, Stubbs removed his end of it from

his waist and retied that end around the Chief of Police.

Kerns made a little uncertain run. Perhaps because of that, his feet reached the take-off obliquely. His toes struck the rock wall, just below the tunnel.

"I'm falling, Reverend!"

There was a thud. Stubbs had jumped.

"All right, sir! We've got him!"

Stubbs was lying, face downward, beside his master. They had their hands under Kerns' armpits. Farther back in the tunnel, the priest, with incredible strength, was keeping the two of them from slipping.

"Easy now, Mr. Kerns," Stubbs urged, soothingly. "Get your knee up. Now you're coming." He laughed. "Well, I guess we made it, sir!"

Their guide must have been of one clay with the imperturbable Stubbs. He waited a moment, while Kerns sat panting with his back to the wall of the tunnel; then:

"You will do well to go before the light fails entirely," he said. "Follow the tunnel. There are no side passages. Before you have gone half the distance, you will see the light from your own world."

"And you?" Daunt asked.

The priest looked out over the darkening abyss.

"This is the supreme beauty," he said. "I have long wished to explore its mystery. If I return to my world I shall not be allowed to live, because of what I have done this day."

Before they could stop him, or even answer, he had leapt back to the rocky spur. He landed lightly. Steadying himself a moment, with outstretched arms, he turned to face them. But he was not looking at them. He was gazing down into the darkening light clouds, now changing from deep purple to black. His voice rang out:

"Thou who art Hawk-headed; thou who art Yesterday and the hope of Tomorrow; who walkest backward, whose habitation is Bast—I come!"

He stripped off his robe. It caught a moment on the edge of the spur, then settled slowly downward. He leapt into the air, with hands poised above him.

The fluttering white patch which was his robe floated far beneath. They saw him pass it, like an arrow. Seconds later, from somewhere in the purple depths, his voice came back to them, in a long cry of greeting and farewell.

The amazing secret of the chasm will be revealed in the startling chapters which bring this story to a conclusion in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

The Mandarin's Ear

By FRANK OWEN

An odd and curious story about a Chinese mandarin who had the ear of a thief grafted in place of the ear he had lost

THE mandarin Wang Mok was distraught. He had gone hunting in the hills west of Peking. Not only had he returned without any game, but he had returned without one of his ears. Where the ear had been, there was now a jagged wound which his numerous doctors bustled about in an effort to heal. Not only was the pain excruciating, but Wang Mok considered that he had lost face. Now he would not be able to be buried in completeness on that day when earth should cease to need him more. And another thing disturbed him. Now when he walked in the garden among his numerous slender slave-women, they might turn their heads that he would not behold them smiling. No longer was the face of Wang Mok round and bland as a full moon. It was a broken moon. Saurin the poet could no longer write sonnets about him.

How he lost his ear ever remained a mystery. Some said that it had been shot off accidentally, others that a wild beast of the mountains had attacked Wang Mox in savage fury, resentful of his desire to spread death through the mountains. But those in the mandarin's party wisely said nothing. Although as a rule the mandarin was a gentle master, upon occasion he had been known to slit the tongue of a cook because he had prepared food for him that had caused his stomach vexation.

And now the doctors shook their heads as they gathered in conclave. For once their extensive resources were inadequate. They could not very well resort to acupuncture, nor for that matter could they prescribe shed snakeskins, asafetida or apricot gold pills. Only a magician could grow a new ear. Then Doctor Wen Hsi, who always walked alone in the pathways of therapeutics and philosophy, craved audience with the mandarin and was at once shown into his august presence.

"My master," he said humbly, after preliminary salutations had been exhausted, "if you will permit me to speak, I will advise you of my humble conclusions in regard to the replacement of your ear."

"Speak freely," the mandarin directed, "for I know you are a doctor possessed of remarkable powers, though I greatly doubt your ability to grow a new ear for me."

Doctor Wen Hsi bowed. "Most gracious master," he said slowly, "I make no claim that I can grow you a new ear, but I believe that with the help of the gods and your august sanction I can replace the one you have lost."

"You mean with an ear of wax?"

"No, with a living ear!"

The mandarin leaned forward on his chair. His eyes lit up and glowed like bright lanterns.

"If you could do that," he whispered tensely, "the fortunes of China would be yours."

"Her body was like warm white velvet."

It was an elegant exaggeration. Wang Mok could not have promised more had he been the emperor instead of only a mandarin. Nevertheless he was fabulously wealthy, so that within reason he could make good his boast.

"Up till now," the doctor went on, "I have only a theory."

"What more do you need?"

"An ear."

The mandarin leaned back and sighed. "A living ear? Where could we find one willing to part with so necessary an appendage save as the result of violence? Besides which, to make the matter more difficult, an ear would have to be found that would match in symmetry the ear I have lost."

"That should not be hard," Wen Hsi said, musingly. "Surely among the hosts of condemned murderers, waiting to have their heads ignominiously chopped off, we could find one willing to give up his ear in exchange for his head."

"Vast approval do I bestow on your plan," the mandarin commented. "Proceed at once with it. Days will drag until that hour when the symmetry of my face shall be restored."

2

MING TI had only five days to live. He sat in his cell, his back against the wall, meditating over the sweetness of life. He smacked his lips. He had found the world a juicy plum and it had not been hard to bite into it. Among thieves, Ming Ti was an emperor; that is why he had the colossal effrontery to assume the name of one of the most illustrious of all Chinese emperors. But then Ming Ti held nothing sacred. He was tall, handsome. No emperor had ever had better features, nor had there been one whose face more truly resembled that of a full moon. And his skin was of a fine golden texture, like the color of the young moon rising. His nose was a bit too flat, but his eyes were glittering. They seemed to be laughing, but it was laughter without warmth. His mouth was firm and his chin strong. But greater in perfection than any other of his features were his ears. Alas! that so soon he would no longer be able to hear the faint swish of the wind through the willows or the glory-song of a Chinese nightingale!

Yet he knew that at his death, many slender girls would weep, girls like flowers, girls from many different provinces. And their tears would fall to form a mighty river on which his soul might flow into the Celestial Heaven. Ming Ti had no desire for immortality. He had little fault to find with a world so constructed that he had money hidden away everywhere. Occasionally there were those who spoiled his play. They protested at his taking money to which he had no right.

Now and then it was necessary to inflict death upon these misguided strangers. Never did he kill with malice. It was merely in the routine of business. But those in authority had become vexed. Protestations had come from various legations. So much pressure had been put upon China that she winced. The result was that Ming Ti was scooped up and thrown into prison. His head was to be sliced from his body. Not in anger. That too was to be merely in the routine of business.

The contemplation of it spoiled the rhythm of Ming Ti's life, for more than anything else he was a poet. He liked to sing little songs to the moon, especially when a slender girl was standing in silhouette in front of it. Ming Ti was a born lover, a veritable emperor of hearts. It was his proud boast that no damsel had ever been able to withstand the ardor of his wooing. Even girls who became his captives ended up by being slaves of his love. Ming Ti knew all that there was to know about war and women. He was a braggart, a boaster, a swashbuckling buccaneer.

Through his life had passed a countless procession of women—women of every hue, women for every mood. Yet now the procession was about to end. The parade was over. Death would be his final mistress. Nor would she succumb to his charms. Rather would it be the other way about. He would join that endless procession of men upon whom death had smiled, then turned away.

Ming Ti sighed. How sweet life was! Life was a great melon. Women were the seeds.

But now the feast was over. In a few days his head would drop from his body, as the executioner demonstrated his skill before an assembled throng. Ming Ti drew his hand across his eyes and shivered. He hoped his head wouldn't roll when it fell to the ground.

And then came Doctor Wen Hsi. From his gracious and charming attitude no one would have imagined that his interest was concerned with trading. He was a merchant extraordinary, willing to trade a head for an ear.

Ming Ti was tired of being alone. His spirits drooped. He was alone in a stinking cell where there was no human about to whom he could boast. There were vermin and rats, to be sure, but they paid little heed to his ravings. Always he had wasted his time in wine shops and in the company of women, telling tall tales about his exploits. Everything was related with some degree of veracity, though slightly multiplied. If he fought one man it was a dozen. If he escaped from his pursuers by swimming a creek it was a mighty river. If he kicked a dog until it fled yelping from his path it became a tiger in the telling. And his exploits in love were equally as amazing. They too were warmed with boasting, but they were so Rabelaisian that they cannot be set down. Suffice to say that no woman could resist him, and certainly there was no woman strong enough to overcome him in nuptial combat. He was a singing troubadour, a Chinese Don Juan. For years he had been the center of his little world. His subjects had willingly grouped around him, for he told his stories well; but, far more important, he dispensed warm wine when the tales were concluded. Now he no longer had wine, and his subjects had dispersed to other tiny kingdoms not overcome by drought. So at the approach of Doctor Wen Hsi he was in a highly receptive mood.

Naturally he was unenthusiastic about the suggestion that he relinquish all claim to his ear, but he was enthusiastic about the opportunity to continue marching onward into life. Life had been too enjoyable for him to contemplate cessation of it without regret.

Now Doctor Wen Hsi was a man of action. Wherever possible he liked to accomplish his work with promptitude. Therefore he took Ming Ti back to the mandarin and amid great pomp and ceremony Ming Ti's ear was transplanted onto the moon-like head of Wang Mok. And in the palace there was great rejoicing, for now the mandarin had not lost face; rather he had regained that part of his face that had been missing.

Ming Ti, the bandit, was amply rewarded. His wound was given the best of attention. When it had healed he was sent forth from the palace, a free man, and his purse had been filled with so much gold that it was burdensome to carry. But Ming Ti soon righted that. He stopped at numerous wine shops, dallied on love boats and squandered his new wealth in profligate living and with such speed that he was soon reduced to a rank little above that of a beggar. So once more he returned to his profession of banditry, which he had perfected until it had become a fine art.

MEANWHILE Wang Mok, the mandarin, walked once more among his slave-women in the vast gardens surrounding his house. Once more he was fit for the adoration of slant-eyed girls. How good it was to feel the caress of slender hands, the warmth and softness of lush red lips, under a Chinese moon! The garden was fragrant with the mingled perfumes of many flowers. And in that garden walked Jasmine, with a body like warm white velvet. When Jasmine smiled, the moon itself bowed in homage. Wang Mok was completely captivated by this slender gorgeous slave who had come to live with him, though now he found himself living with her. He obeyed her every wish. She was a delicate, fragile, perfumed tyrant. She cared not in the slightest for Wang Mok, but she was appreciative of the position in which she was placed through her association with him. Her family had been poor farmers who lived in the shadow of the Yellow River. Sometimes the shadows deepened and floods enveloped the land like great

laughter. It was a continuous struggle between man and the river, but eventually the river won. The little family, like a million others, was reduced to a state of starvation perched on the fringe of death. It was at this time that Jasmine urged her father to sell her into slavery, so that the rest of the family might be freed from their shackles of poverty. Despite the feeble protests of those dear to her, Jasmine's will prevailed. Through an agent in Peking who was famous for his traffic in women, she eventually found herself the property of Wang Mok. Never had she beheld a mansion more beautiful, nor a garden more fragrant. At night when the moon was high, Wang Mok lingered with her in one of the tiny pavilions that stood like a jewel on the edge of an artificial lake, and drew her to his breast.

Jasmine desired more than anything else to please Wang Mok, for Wang Mok had made her family comparatively affluent. Now they were the one prosperous clan in a village of beggars. It pleased them to flaunt their success. And though Jasmine gave herself to Wang Mok willingly, she was never stirred by his wooing. To her he had far less personality than the moon or the trees that grew in the garden.

Now that he had a new ear, Wang Mok's esteem of himself increased. He never appreciated the worth of his ear until it had been snatched from him. And so the sleep of Wang Mok was calm and serene, but unfortunately it did not remain so for long. Presently a night came when he tossed upon his kong and groaned in misery, for he seemed to be suffering torture, the same torture that he could hear as though on the breath of the wind from some far-distant place. Sighs and groans and much weeping. Hours on end of torture, and a man sitting in a jail cell, pleading to the gods to smite him down and end sufferings so extreme.

Once more Wang Mok summoned the renowned Doctor Wen Hsi and related the strange occurrences of the night, but to the learned doctor such phenomena were far from a mystery.

"You are wearing the ear of Ming Ti," he explained, "and so you hear all the things that are happening to him. And I might add that at this moment things are happening to him in considerable quantities. For Ming Ti has been arrested once more for being a bandit, and hour after hour he is being tortured with all the refinements and perfection of that gentle art."

"But this must cease," the mandarin said irritably, "for by torturing Ming Ti they are torturing me. Arrange for his release at once."

"I will do so," the doctor said, "and I believe, as ever, your decision is a wise one. I suggest carrying it a step farther, however, to guard against such a thing happening again. Ming Ti is a bandit, and a bandit he will always remain. He will steal anything when urged by poverty, and so efficiently does he squander money that it is a practical impossibility to keep him always in funds. Given the wealth of all China, he would squander it in a few years. It is my thought that if Ming Ti were brought to this garden to dwell for ever in peace and plenty with his own servants to wait upon him the urge to steal would not be sharpened to so keen an edge. And both you and he would be able to sleep of nights, for there would be nothing to interrupt the calm measure of your dreams."

"That is an excellent plan," agreed Wang Mok, and his joy was far in excess of that warranted by the occasion.

3

So Ming Ti was brought to the garden of the mandarin. He was bathed and dressed in elaborate clothes, after which he was served a meal fit for the gods, a meal that was a poem in fifty courses. And as the meal progressed the mandarin entered and sat at the table also. In glowing phrases he bade Ming Ti welcome.

"Henceforth," said he, "you will be permitted the run of my house, for you are now my brother. We are blood brothers, united by an exchange of ears."

Ming Ti smiled insolently. "Hardly that," said he, "for I did not receive any ear in return."

"That is true," the mandarin said blandly, "but in my eyes, you have an ear. This ear that I am wearing will ever be yours. And to seal the compact I give you this house and garden as your home till death."

Ming Ti bowed. "You are most gracious," he declared. "First you give me my life. And now you give me a new splendid world in which to enjoy it. Truly it is like being born anew. May I be worthy of the honors which you are showering down upon me."

"If you have a wife," Wang Mok went on, "she shall be brought here so that you may enjoy the pleasures with which she is able to supply you."

"I have no wife," Ming Ti said curtly. "There is no one I wish to bring here."

"If you have any desires, make them known to me," the mandarin told him at parting.

Before that day had drawn to a close and the sun had gone over the far hills to die, Ming Ti had flamed with a great desire, but he did not mention the matter to the mandarin. For as he walked through that enchanted garden in the late afternoon, he encountered Jasmine, who was walking alone. Her slender body vied with the flowers in loveliness. There was fragrance in her breath, fragrance in her smile as she stepped aside for Ming Ti to pass. And though Ming Ti passed, his thoughts remained with Jasmine. He paused and looked back, scarcely believing that such enchantment could be reality. And at that moment, Ming Ti stepped into a dream, a dream that became more beautiful day by day. It warmed and grew rich in color. Now Ming Ti was no longer a bandit. He was merely a man, conquered by love. Nor was his love fruitless, for it stirred an echo in Jasmine's gentle breast.

In the ensuing days they contrived to meet each other frequently, and it happened, as such things do, that eventually their love blended and became one. Their two lives flowed onward like a peaceful river. But they were not happy, for Ming Ti knew that the mandarin shared the favors of Jasmine with him, and jealousy overcame him like a mighty flood. He felt as though he were drowning, unable to breathe. He must get Jasmine away from this enchanted prison. Not for a moment did Ming Ti think of all the comfort he would be surrendering by leaving the garden to go into an exile of poverty. Jasmine would go with him. Therefore nothing else mattered. Having Jasmine, he would have everything. At last Ming Ti had become as profound as any of the sages of old China. All that is worthwhile in life is reflected in the smile of a beloved woman.

When Wang Mok, the mandarin, was advised one morning that they had fled, he was distraught. It was as though sunshine had vanished from the garden. The birds no longer sang, there was no melody in the tree-tops, and the flowers had lost their fragrance. Night after night he lay sleepless, listening to the wooing of Ming Ti. Although he did not know where the lovers had gone, each night he list-

ened to their whispering. The ear of Ming Ti had restored symmetry to the mandarin's face, but it had taken away serenity of mind.

As the weeks rolled on and drearily grew into months, the agents of the mandarin scoured the empire for any trace of Jasmine or the bandit, but without success. Apparently they had vanished like spirits into the very air. It was a profound mystery, an event without reason. And yet, though none of the searchers suspected it, the explanation was so simple that it needed little explanation. Ming Ti and Jasmine had merely stepped over the threshold of China and it was as though a door had closed upon them. To the heart of Indo-China they went, where they could find heart's ease and serenity.

Now during his life Wang Mok had owned and possessed many women. Some were like fine bits of fragile porcelains, some like flowers, a few as smooth as jade. He had enjoyed a feast of love, a feast of many courses; nor did he care particularly when one was taken from him. And now that Jasmine was gone, he might have forgotten her if he had not been forced to listen to the music of her voice as she sang exquisite love-songs to Ming Ti. And the ear of Ming Ti on the face of the mandarin strained so hard to catch every note, it was almost like an attack of acute neuralgia. The pain kept Jasmine ever in his thoughts, which naturally kept her ever in his heart. Night after night his sleep was disturbed. He became irritable and fretful. He tried the salve of the velvet bodies of other women. But still his ear, the ear of Ming Ti, listened for the magic tones of Jasmine's rippling voice.

And then one night, surprizingly, Wang Mok slept through till dawn. No dreams, no pain. The soft golden body beside him gave him warmth. The gentle breasts of the newest of his slaves were silken cushions against which he lay sleeping. When he awakened he gazed about him, unable to comprehend this new freedom that had been thrust upon him. He put his hand to his face. His ear was as cold as ice. It was without feeling. With it he could hear nothing. And once more Wang Mok sent for Doctor Wen Hsi and acquainted him with all that had occurred.

Wen Hsi examined the ear thoroughly.

"Strange are the ways of the gods," he mused.

"What do you mean?" asked the mandarin.

"This ear is dead. It must be cut from your body before it begins to rot. I strongly recommend that it be done within the hour."

"But how do you explain it?" the mandarin persisted.

"Somewhere, somehow," the doctor began, "Ming Ti has met death. He has gone to join the spirits of his ancestors and he has taken his ear with him. That ear still belongs to Ming Ti. It always heard the things that were happening to Ming Ti. We erred when we attempted to meddle with the affairs of the gods."

The mandarin smiled. After all, there were many nights to come, Chinese nights entertainments to rival any of those related of Bagdad in the book of a thousand and one stories.

Later that day, an operation was performed. For the second time Wang Mok lost an ear, but this time he did not mind, for he had grown to believe that by surrendering his ear, he had regained his "face," which was vastly more important. Better, he believed, to have one ear and enjoy the repose of yellow-velvet fragrant nights, than to have two ears and toss sleepless until dawn.

"On the back of each flying reptile was a saddle, and a human rider."

World of the Dark Dwellers

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrilling weird-scientific tale of a distant world and the dreadful creatures that tyrannized over its human subjects—a story of the heroic Brotherhood of the Redeemer

1. The Call to Krann

MY FATHER was dying. I bent over his bed, with an aching misery in my heart and a hard, strangling lump in my throat. I felt hot, stinging tears behind my eyelids.

In the carven bed my father continued to gasp out his life. A mere, withered shell of a man now, but with something in his great, gaunt figure and wasted, dark face that made it seem that I looked at myself grown older. For we were two of the same breed, a breed hard and strong and somehow a little strange.

"Father?" My voice was almost harsh

in my attempts to keep it level. "You wanted to tell me something?"

"Yes, Eric." James North, my father, gasped the words in a hoarse whisper, with agonized effort. His eyes were hypnotic, widened black pools of pain and desperate resolve. "Must tell you before I die—the great secret of our race—the secret of two worlds——"

"Don't try to talk, father, if it hurts you," I said, forcing down the choking lump in my throat.

"*Must* tell you!" My father's voice was a thick, strangled stuttering now. "Eric, listen closely. You know that since your childhood you have been instructed in speaking and reading a strange language, unlike any language known on Earth."

"Yes, father. You never would tell me why I had to learn it, and all the other things." Even in this moment of aching grief, I felt a little of the puzzlement that had clouded my mind so long.

How I had puzzled over it, during all these years! That utterly strange language which my father had carefully taught me, a language the like of which I had never since discovered among Earth's past or present tongues. Weird, alien language from the unknown! And my father also insisted on my learning expert swordsmanship, on my choosing a scientific career; never explaining the reason, saying only, "You'll learn why later, Eric."

And now the time for explanations had come at last. My father's dying moments! Only this morning the telegram had summoned me from the New York university where I was a rising young physicist, up here to the old Connecticut family estate, where my father lay suddenly stricken. My father, drifting out of life, wanting desperately before he died to explain something to me.

His dying eyes were ghastly in their brilliance, as though life was flaming up in them one last time before going out.

He whispered, "The chain—the chain around my neck, Eric. Take it off."

My fingers fumbled under his pajama jacket, and I drew from around his neck the thin chain there. At its end was a curious little emblem or medallion of gray, shining metal like platinum.

The emblem consisted merely of three interlinked pentagons. It was cool in my grasp, and I felt somehow an electric thrill from holding it, a strange sense of new power, as though alien forces rushed into me from the little emblem.

"Put it around your neck," gasped my father. "Wear it while you live, and before you die, give it to *your* son. It has come down thus in our house for countless generations—it is the ancient symbol of kingship in the world of Krann."

His speech became a wild, gasping rattle and he clutched my arm convulsively. "The scroll—the scroll you will find in the coffer in my safe— it will tell you the story, the great secret of our house, and why some day one of our race must go back to Krann. I hoped to be that one, but my scientific knowledge was not great enough. Perhaps, after all these generations, you will be the one."

His eyes burned into my face. "Somehow I think you *will* be the one who at last goes back to that other world! But if you go—beware the Dwellers in Darkness—the warning in the scroll——"

Quite suddenly and softly, my father was dead. He had simply relaxed in my arms, his voice ceasing, his brilliant, burning eyes dulling into an empty stare.

TEARS struggled into my eyes as I lowered his pitifully wasted figure back onto the bed. The strain of hard, rigid self-control in my nature made me fight back those tears as I went slowly to the door and called the waiting physician.

"He's gone, doctor," I said tonelessly.

The doctor nodded soberly. "It was only will-power that kept him alive this long. He said he must see you before he died." He added sympathetically, "I would try to get a little rest, Eric, if I were you."

I nodded, my lips tightly compressed, and went down the dusky, echoing stairs of the old house and slowly entered the library. The twilight outside made the book-lined room a place of gloom and whispers as I sat down at the desk.

Even my aching grief could not conquer the wonder and doubt in my mind. What strange thing had my dying father tried to tell me, about another world called Krann, and about a great secret connected with our family and with the strange language I had been taught in childhood? What did it mean? Had my father been delirious?

I could not believe that. I inspected the emblem I had hung around my neck, the three interlinked pentagons of gleaming gray metal. Weird, odd-looking thing! What had my father said—that it was a sign, a symbol of kingship in that other world?

Then I suddenly remembered my father's other dying words. The coffer in his safe—the coffer that contained the scroll. What scroll? I had never heard of it before, any more than I had heard of this odd emblem. But I sensed that in the coffer might be—explanation.

Rapidly I crossed the dusky room to the library safe. It was locked, but I knew the combination, and opened it. A brief search of the interior discovered the coffer. I carried it over to the desk and sat for a moment staring at the thing in the dusky gloom.

It was an oblong box of black metal, with a hinged lid. The box was light, lighter than any metal thing its size should have been. My scientifically trained eyes saw instantly that the black metal of this coffer was no metal known on Earth.

I swung back the lid eagerly. My grief, real and aching though it was, had for the time receded into the back of my brain. I felt on the brink of tremendous mystery. My nostrils quivered to a faint, baffling, alien scent that drifted out of the open coffer.

In the black metal box was but one thing—a roll of brown, parchment-like material. My fingers felt its texture as I drew it forth. It was thin, tanned skin of some kind, but not any skin I had ever encountered—a finely grained parchment of extraordinary toughness and durability. Yet even so, it was worn and frayed and grimed, as though by the hands of many generations.

I unrolled it. In the dusk, rows of large red characters stood out dimly on the worn brown scroll. Hastily I snapped on the desk lamp. My eyes flew over the first lines of letters. Odd, stiff-looking letters they were, more like the ancient Egyptian hieratic writing than anything else, but different from that—far different from any writing known to men of this day.

Yet I could read those dim characters, for they were in the strange language my father had so patiently taught me in my childhood; the language I had never found anywhere else in the world, and had so often puzzled about. I trembled with excitement as I read the first lines.

"From Nort Norus, rightful Khal of Krann, to his sons and sons' sons and all generations that shall come after them—greetings!"

A cold breath of the alien unknown seemed to blow through the lamplit library upon me. I suddenly knew, with a shiver of awesome certainty, that out of these dim crimson letters a voice was

speaking to me from across unthinkable ages of time.

Yet I read swiftly on, my heart pounding with excitement, as that long-dead ancestor spoke through the parchment across the great gulf of time.

"You who read this will be a child of Earth," I read, "and will not know of any other world. But learn that I, Nort Norus, your ancestor, was not born on this world but on a world that lies unthinkably far across the starry universe from Earth. That other world, which revolves around a dying red sun, is called Krann.

"I, Nort Norus, was Khal of Krann, its supreme king and ruler like my fathers before me. I ruled all the cities and peoples on the surface of Krann. In the cavernous interior of our world lived the dreaded Dwellers in Darkness, creatures unhuman and evil whose power and craft are greater than that of any human. But the Dwellers in Darkness could never emerge onto the surface, since sunlight or moonlight kills them; so they could not attack us, and my people lived in peace and plenty.

"I was a just and kind ruler and my people loved me. In my reigning city of Zinziba, I occupied my leisure in searching for wisdom, delving into the secrets of nature. In that search I discovered that points in the universe far separated three-dimensionally may be very close in other dimensions, and I saw that it would be possible to short-cut through those other dimensions to worlds far, far across the cosmos from Krann. But I thought no more of my discovery, for my duty was on Krann.

"Then came — rebellion! A distant cousin of mine aspired to be Khal of Krann in my place. He knew he and his few plotting followers could not by themselves supplant me, loved and revered as I was by my people. So in his resolve to usurp my throne, this plotter did an accursed and awful thing. He went secretly down into the dark bowels of Krann where no man had ever dared go before, to the Dwellers in Darkness. And he made a compact with the dread unhuman ones that if they helped him supplant me, he would give them anything they desired in return.

"The Dwellers in Darkness accepted the unholy compact. They lent the usurper strange and superhuman powers, and in return asked that when he came to the kingship he would deliver them each year as sacrifices a certain number of his human subjects. For the Dwellers in Darkness for some reason crave the brains of humans for their purposes. The usurper swore to deliver them the sacrifices they asked.

"With the powers they had given him, the usurper and his followers swept all before them and at last besieged my capital city Zinziba. My family and few surviving followers were hemmed in, and I saw we must flee. To no place in Krann could we flee; so hastily I prepared a mechanism that would hurl us across the universe to another world, by short-cutting through dimensions. That mechanism, whose plan is at the end of this writing, succeeded and in an instant flung us far across the starry universe onto this savage, alien world of Earth. The usurper could not follow us here, but we were fugitives on a strange world, attacked by brute-like men and monstrous beasts. We fought to survive, and I, Nort Norus, burned always with the resolve to return some day to Krann, crush the usurper, and stop the delivery of my people as sacrifices to the evil Dwellers in Darkness.

"But I could not do it! I, Nort Norus, was already old and had to exert all my powers to keep my faithful followers

from perishing, on this wild world of Earth. Now I am dying, but I write this message to be handed down as a sacred trust to my son and his sons after him. Let them cherish the scroll from generation to generation, it and the sacred symbol which is the sign of kingship of the Khal of Krann. Let them teach their sons the language of my people that they may read the scroll. And some day surely one of my descendants will be able to return to Krann and cast down the usurper's successors and stop the unholy sacrifices.

"You, who now read my words after perhaps many ages, may be the one to go. If you have the knowledge and power to go back to Krann, I solemnly charge you, go! Do not fail your enslaved people on distant Krann; for they are still your people, you are their rightful Khal, though ages have passed before you read this. It may be you will perish hideously in the quest, for awful are the powers of the Dwellers in Darkness that are allies to the usurper's house. But right shall arm you, and if you die, you die in defense of right. And know that if you go, there goes with you the spirit of your dead ancestor, Nort Norus, Khal of Krann."

I LAID down the scroll. My brain was stunned with wonder. The lettered words had seemed like a clear, loud voice speaking in my ear, a sharp cry out of the long-dead past, a solemn message that had been passed down from generation to generation.

Could it all be true, I asked myself? Another peopled world, far across the universe, from which long ago the ancestors of my family had come to Earth? A world peopled by civilized humans, haunted by fear of a dark, powerful, unhuman race beneath?

The strange coffer and scroll, and the emblem around my neck, could have come only from another world, surely. I snatched up the scroll again, unrolled it past the end of the writing. There was the plan Nort Norus had mentioned, a diagram of a mechanism clear enough to me as a modern physicist. A way to short-cut across the universe's dimensions, by generating a super-vibratory force that would thrust the machine through the continuum of ordinary gravitational space. . . .

I could build that machine, could flash across the universe in an instant to that other world, with this plan before me! My imagination fired to the incredible adventure. To leap to that distant world, a weird, alien world of which I was rightful ruler! To win back the kingship that my long-dead ancestor had lost, and break the black yoke of dread evil that had been placed upon my people!

Yes, they were *my* people. For I, Eric North, was rightful Khal of Krann, and around my neck swung the emblem of kingship. And from that emblem subtle currents of power and confidence seemed rushing into me. By heaven, I would pull down the usurpers who long ago had driven our house from the throne! I would destroy them for daring to deliver my people as sacrifices to the evil ones of the dark spaces inside Krann!

For a moment, a cold doubt chilled my leaping blood. Those dark, unhuman creatures of the interior—after all, their aid to the usurper had been too much for my ancestor long ago. He himself had had to flee that world, and in the scroll had warned, "Awful are the powers of the Dwellers in Darkness." And my father had repeated that warning as he lay dying. Could I hope to win against them when Nort Norus himself had lost?

I forced back that chilling doubt. My mind had set in unchangeable resolve. I was going to accept the tremendous adventure, go to that world and fight to break that black tyranny over my people.

There waited for me either a hideous, awful death or the kingship of a world.

I spoke aloud, in a low, tense voice, as though to someone in the dusky room with me.

"I'm going, Nort Norus," I said. "One of your sons is going back at last—to Krann."

2. *The Brotherhood of the Redeemer*

I STOOD upon the flat metal top of the squat, square mechanism that had taken me three months to build, the mechanism that was to hurl me far across the universe to another world!

"Zero hour," I muttered to myself, my hand slowly lifting toward the little control panel.

The machine was five feet square and two feet high. Inside its metal case were the batteries and transformers and great vacuum tubes whose radiated force, when turned on, would rip ordinary space and hurl the machine and any matter on it into a distant quarter of the gravitational continuum. It stood here in a corner of the lamplit library of the old house, my makeshift laboratory.

It had taken all my scientific knowledge to build the thing, even with the diagram's guidance. And even yet I was haunted by doubts. If the machine failed to operate as I expected, it might fling me clear out of our spatial universe altogether. Or if its adjustments were not quite right, it might hurl me to a different world than distant Krann.

That terrible doubt was a dark shadow over me as I hesitated with hands on the switch. In a mirror across the room I glimpsed myself—a strange figure. My tall, great-limbed figure clad in khaki shirt and shorts, at my belt a long sword such as my father had taught me to use, my black head bare. That strong doubt visible on my dark, aquiline face.

I bit my lip and gritted, "No time for doubts now. It's a gamble—with my life staked on a chance of reaching Krann."

My heart pounded as I gripped the switch. I whispered, "In the next moment, Krann or death. Here goes."

I snapped the switch shut. Instantly a terrific force struck me a stunning blow. All went black and I knew nothing more.

WHEN I awoke, I was first aware that I lay prone on the top of the machine. I opened my eyes, then blinked them in the sunlight. It was dark red sunlight—over my head stretched an unearthly ocher sky in which burned a huge, dying, smoldering deep crimson sun.

I staggered to my feet and stared around in stupefied awe. A weird jungle towered around me, a vast, solemnly silent forest whose black-trunked trees rose high into the dusky air, bearing masses of crimson foliage. Between the dark trunks were growths of bright scarlet shrubbery. My machine rested in a small natural clearing.

The soil under it was jet-black. Black were the rocks that showed here and there from it, and inky black were the waters of a small stream that chuckled near by. This was indeed a black world, its somber hue relieved only by the blood-like color of the thick vegetation. A dark, unearthly, red-splashed landscape, stretching under the ocher sky.

"Krann!" I whispered to myself. "I'm in Krann. But where are the cities and the people—my people?"

My heart was throbbing with superhuman excitement. In this weird world my ancestors long ago had been kings, and into it I had adventured in reckless quest to regain that long-lost kingship.

"Have to be careful," I muttered to myself. "Find out first how much this

world has changed, before I try to do anything."

Then subtle confidence and power seemed to flow into me again from the symbol inside my shirt. "By heaven, I'll act when the time comes. This world—it's *my* world, by right!"

My first thought was to hide the machine. I got off it and dragged it toward a near-by cluster of thick scarlet shrubbery, over which towered a tall tree with smooth, leafless black branches. Then as I dragged the machine into hiding under this tree, a horrible thing happened.

The black branches of the tree reached down like great tentacles and grasped me! They started to draw me into the glossy trunk. I uttered a hoarse cry and jerked back. Just in time I tore loose from those branch-tentacles before others seized me. The limbs of the octupus-tree whipped wildly and bafflledly after me, seeking again to clutch me.

I wiped my brow, stood trembling. In sick horror I stared at the diabolical thing. Now I saw that there were other of the leafless, glossy black trees in the red jungle, and divined that they were half animal and half plant, rooted but able to seize and devour prey.

Suddenly across the brooding silence of this dusky landscape came a sharp cry of horror in a human voice.

I whirled, stared tensely in that direction. The cry came again, shriller, an agonized call for help.

I hesitated no longer, but plunged through the thick jungle in that direction. The horror and agony in that call had been too great to resist. Through thorny underbrush I fought, hacking my way with my sword, avoiding the black devil-trees. Then as I crashed into another small natural glade, I stopped horrified for a moment.

In this glade grew another of the octopus-trees, and its myriad supple tentacle-branches held a human victim, drawing the hapless human toward the central trunk where a gaping slit had opened. The tree was about to devour its victim.

And the victim was a girl! A slender girl clad in white shirt and shorts much like my own, her eyes dark pools of horror in her white face as she twisted frantically in the devil-tree's grasp. She was vainly trying to use a dagger, but her white arms and limbs were held helpless.

I plunged forward with a yell, and my upraised sword came down in terrific strokes on the tentacles that clutched the girl. The blade hacked through half of them and they oozed black blood or sap. But others whipped out angrily to grasp me. I tore my sword-arm free from them and struck again, severing more of the branches that held the girl. One more swift stroke sliced the last tentacle coiled around her.

Before other branches could grasp us I tore the girl away from the devilish thing. I staggered with her safely out of reach of it, and then stopped, panting.

I gasped, speaking the language of Krann taught me so long ago, "That was close! The thing nearly had us both."

The girl, with stunning unexpectedness, stabbed at my heart with the dagger in her hand!

My instinctive backward leap just saved me. Her keen dagger tore down through the front of my shirt.

I cried, "What in the world's the matter with——"

The girl, dark eyes blazing out of her taut white face, struck at me again before I could finish the words.

This time, better prepared, I knocked her arm aside and seized her. She twisted like a wildcat in my grip but I held her.

"Is this the gratitude I get for saving your life?" I cried wrathfully.

The girl blazed, "You saved me only

to take me back to Zinziba a prisoner, guard!"

I understood her speech, though her language was slightly different from that I had learned. The ancient language of Krann had changed some during the long ages, but apparently not much.

One word in her speech caught me. Zinziba! The chief city of this world, where long ago my forefathers had reigned as the Khals of Krann!

I said, puzzled, "I am no guard, and have no desire to take you prisoner. I only wanted——"

Suddenly two brawny arms seized me from behind! Instantly I released my hold on the girl and sought to turn with my sword on my unseen attacker, but could not. Those huge arms held me helpless.

I SQUIRMED my head a little around. It was a giant of a man who had gripped me, a towering, craggy-faced warrior with eyes hard and merciless as gray steel. A great sword swung at his belt.

Beside him was another man. He was older, his hair gray, his thin face deeply lined and wrinkled, his faded eyes searching.

The giant who held me boomed to the girl, "Use your dagger on him, Lura. Quick, before other guards come after him!"

The girl Lura hesitated. "He says he is no guard, Herk Ell."

Herk Ell, the giant holding me, bellowed, "He's lying, of course! He's one of those cursed spawn from Zinziba who have been hunting us."

The gray-haired older man said quickly, "Maybe the man speaks truth, Herk Ell. He may be of our Brotherhood."

I did not understand what he meant, but I sensed my imminent danger and exclaimed, "I'm no guard—I don't even know who the guards are. And I've never been in Zinziba."

Herk Ell, still holding me like a baby in those huge arms, laughed raspingly. "Hear the liar," grated the giant. "Wal Az, look at the sole of his foot and see if he be of the Brotherhood."

Wal Az, the gray-haired older man, bent down and to my amazement slipped the sandals off my feet. He examined my soles.

Then the older man straightened, and his lined face too became bleak and merciless. He said metallically, "The sign in not on his foot. He is not of the Brotherhood."

"I knew he was of the guards!" boomed Herk Ell triumphantly. "Quick, put your dagger in his heart, Lura."

My brain whirled dizzily from the stunning turn of events. I saw the girl Lura come farward with dagger upraised. Her white, soft face had hardened in the same merciless hate of me the others showed. And though her mouth quivered, her dark eyes were relentless in resolve.

I struggled madly to break loose, to fight, but was helpless in the giant's mighty arms. Lura raised her dagger, and involuntarily I closed my eyes. This was the end of my adventure, at the very beginning! Wild regret surged through my heart. That I, descendant of the ancient Khals, should at last come back to Krann only to stumble into death!

I did not feel any stabbing strike, and re-opened my eyes. Lura was still standing with the dagger upraised, but appeared frozen motionless. She was staring at my breast, where her former attack had ripped open my shirt. Her face was suddenly dead-white with fear and awe.

"Strike, girl!" snarled Herk Ell over my shoulder. "What delays you?"

Lura pointed a trembling finger at my

breast. Her frozen lips could utter but a whisper. "Look——"

Herk Ell craned his huge head over my shoulder to look down at my breast, and the gray-haired Wal Az also leaned to stare. And I saw the same incredulous awe in the girl's face falling upon their faces.

They stared at my breast like men who behold something they know cannot be real. The arms of Herk Ell fell limply from me.

The craggy-faced giant muttered slowly, "Gods of Krann—the sign of the Redeemer!"

Wal Az's faded eyes shone at me in almost superhuman awe and exaltation. He cried, "The Redeemer! He has come at last!"

And suddenly, I understood. They were all three gazing in awe at the gray metal symbol of interlinked pentagons which swung around my neck and which the ripping of my shirt had disclosed: the sign of the ancient Khals of Krann. It was still remembered, then, by the people of Krann! Sudden strong confidence swept away my daze as I stood there beneath the awed gaze of the three.

Lura whispered to me, "You *are* the Redeemer, are you not? He whom generations have prayed might come back to Krann, from whatever far place the great Khal Nort Norus went to long ago?"

I answered, "I am Eric, one of the sons of Nort Norus. I have come back to take my rightful place as Khal of Krann."

The giant Herk Ell raised his sword and cried exultantly, "Let me be first to hail you, Khal Erik! And know that I and all of the Brotherhood will follow you to death."

"The Brotherhood?" I said questioningly.

Lura explained with throbbing eagerness. "The Brotherhood of the Redeemer, Khal Erik! For ever since that long-dead night when the great Nort Norus and his family vanished from this world, many have believed that some day one of his sons would come back to destroy the evil that now rules here, and rule us again in peaceful justice. We of the secret Brotherhood who believe that have on our foot-soles a secret sign. We thought that you, who bore no such sign on your foot, must be our enemy."

I asked quickly, "Do the successors of the usurpers still rule? Do the sacrifices to the Dwellers in Darkness still go on?"

"They do, Khal Erik." There was dim horror and quivering new hope in Lura's shining dark eyes. "In the city Zinziba, Gor Om, descendant of the usurper, sits and rules this world. And once each month he delivers many of us into the car that takes the human sacrifices down into the black spaces inside this world, to the Dwellers in Darkness."

She added, "We three would have been numbered this time among the sacrifices, for it was discovered that we belong to the secret Brotherhood of the Redeemer which Gor Om hates and tries to root out. But we escaped Zinziba and have hidden in these jungles. Guards have constantly sought to recapture us, flying over the jungles on their rhors, searching for us. We thought you one of them."

I thought quickly and then told them decisively, "I must go to Zinziba and there make myself known to those of your Brotherhood, rally them secretly so that we may sweep Gor Om from his throne——"

"Into the jungle—the guards come!" hissed Wal Az at that instant, pointing wildly upward. Herk Ell's great sword leaped out and Lura uttered a cry as we looked up.

Up there had appeared a score of great flying creatures, flapping swiftly across the ocher sky, low over the red roof

of the forest. They were huge, gray-green flying reptiles like winged dinosaurs, with great heads, fanged jaws, and long bodies with enormous wings.

And on the back of each flying reptile was a saddle and a human rider! Men up there, black-armored men riding the winged reptiles across the sky, peering searchingly downward as they flapped on.

We bolted across the open glade toward the shelter of the jungle. But Wal Az cried despairingly, "Too late—they've seen us!"

For the peering eyes of one of the riders up there had discerned us running across the glade. He shouted loudly to his companions, and at the same time turned his flying steed in the air by manipulating the reins that ran to its head.

Instantly the other reptilian flying-creatures were turned by their riders also. With a wild whir of wings and chorus of triumphant yells, the whole nightmare company of steeds and riders rushed down from the heavens after us.

3. *In the Black City*

We never reached the edge of the jungle. Before we came near it, the armored riders swooped down into the glade, threw themselves from their weird winged steeds, and were upon us. We had just time to turn and raise our swords to meet their rush.

They came at us with ferocious shouts, a wolfish-faced crew led by a helmeted captain. The winged reptiles from which they had dismounted remained resting with folded wings on the ground behind them. Herk Ell and old Wal Az and I had thrust the girl behind us.

"Cursed slaves of Gor Om, take *that!*" yelled Herk Ell, eyes blazing, as he swung his huge sword in a tremendous sweep.

The terrific slicing blow sent the head of one of the guards leaping from his shoulders. At the same time I stabbed fiercely at the throat of another, and saw him reel back, mortally wounded.

"Alive—take them alive!" bawled the captain of our black-armored attackers.

Then for a few moments it was a mad bedlam of clashing steel and ringing shouts of rage and fear. Herk Ell downed another guard but got a thrust through his shoulder in return. Wal Az had fallen, stunned by a blow from the flat of a sword blade.

The wild mêlée could have lasted but a few minutes. In that time I got my sword-point between the armor of another of our attackers. But half the guards had worked around to our rear. I heard Lura scream, and turned to find her struggling in the grip of two of the guards.

I sprang to help her, but at that moment was seized by others at my own back. They bore me down by weight of numbers, and I felt them pinioning my hands and feet with thongs. Herk Ell still fought wildly, roaring defiance as he swung his huge blade. But in a moment he too was borne down by overpowering numbers.

When he also had been bound into a helpless log, the helmeted captain of the guards struck him across his bloody, bruised face.

"Scum of the Brotherhood," snarled the officer. "Gor Om's heart will be glad when we bring you back to Zinziba."

A guard who stood over me asked his superior, "What of this one? He is not one of those we were sent out to recapture, so we may as well kill him here."

His sword was poised over my heart. The symbol I wore around my neck, the ancient pentagonal emblem, had in the struggle slipped around to my back so that it could no longer be seen.

The captain rasped, "No, we take him

with the others. He is undoubtedly one of their cursed secret society who has been helping them hide, and the great Gor Om will reward him for that kindness."

A bestial roar of laughter went up from the others at the cruel jest. The captain ordered, "We return to Zinziba! Each of you four take one of the prisoners with you on your rhors."

The four guards he indicated dragged our helpless forms toward their waiting winged steeds. The rhors, as the flying reptiles were called, crouched awaiting their masters, and as I was dragged toward one by my immediate captor, I glimpsed the creature's grotesqueness more closely.

I was dumped across the front of the saddle, and my guard clambered astride the saddle itself. Lying there, I could see that there were stirrups for his feet like those of any saddle, and tough leather reins that ran to metal rings embedded in the rhor's jawbones. My three fellow prisoners' trussed forms were similarly slung across saddles; then the captain shouted and the creatures rose with a thunder of flapping wings.

The rhors flew with immense power, climbing steeply into the dusky red sunlight. The helmeted officer flew ahead, leading the troop. At a height of a thousand feet we flew across the red jungles, a strange cavalcade in the sky.

My heart was like lead. My brief dream of gathering the Brotherhood of the Redeemer to my standard and plucking Gor Om from his throne in Zinziba seemed shattered. I was going to Zinziba, yes, but as an ignominious prisoner dragged to a nameless fate instead of as Khal of Krann claiming my rightful throne.

Yet I still did not despair. The subtle confidence that seemed to flow into me from the symbol inside my shirt still hardened me. And though hideous doom loomed ahead, I was still grim in my determination to free my people, when we came at last into sight of the towers of Zinziba.

It was like a black fairy city, rising from the red vegetation of this somber black world! For the city was of black metal, a close-clustered mass of slim, ebon spires that vied with one another in climbing into the dusky sunset. A dark, high wall enclosed it from the surrounding forest, and I perceived that the city was a perfect pentagon in shape.

We flew closer, and I could see many rhors with riders flapping to and fro over the black spires. Lights were winking forth in the city as the sun sank. Now I perceived that at the mathematical center of the pentagonal metropolis was a tapering black tower that was also pentagonal in cross-section and climbed higher than any of the other pinnacles.

Our rhors glided down with rigid wings amid the tremendous spires. I glimpsed throngs of white-clothed men and women in the darkening streets below. Our winged steeds swept toward the base of the highest central tower, and in a walled courtyard behind that tower I had brief vision of a great, round opening in the black pavement, a dark well that seemed like the entrance to lightless spaces underneath.

Our rhors swept over the enclosure of that ominous opening, and alighted in another walled court just beside the wall of the enormous pentagonal tower. There were other rhors resting here, and black-armored attendants who ran forward to us.

One of them exclaimed to our captors' captain, "You recaptured the fugitives, then? The Khal Gor Om will be greatly pleased."

The helmeted captain declared, "I take

them before the Khal for judgment now. Untie their bonds."

We were yanked off the rhors and our bonds were loosed. Herk Ell stretched his great arms ominously, and the score of guards around us raised their swords threateningly.

"March!" snarled the helmeted captain to us, pointing. "One move to resist, and you'll die here."

"Better die so than wait for the black car of the Dwellers in Darkness," muttered Herk Ell, bunching his great muscles to fight.

I whispered swiftly to him, "No, don't resist! While we live, there is a chance, for I have something in mind if they take us before Gor Om as they say."

"There is no escape for us now," the giant muttered, and I saw the same hopelessness reflected on the faces of Lura and old Wal Az.

Nevertheless, Herk Ell refrained from attacking the guards. With their naked swords raised alertly around us, and the captain leading, we were conducted into the huge pentagonal tower.

We passed through halls and corridors of ebon metal, softly illuminated by indirect light. My heart throbbed with strange emotion. This was the palace of the Khals, where my forefathers had once reigned.

We were halted by guards at a great double door, while our captain stated his business. Soon one of our challengers returned and said, "The Khal Gor Om will see and judge the prisoners now."

THE huge doors swung wide. Before us opened a vast pentagonal chamber at the center of the tower. Softly illuminated with almost liquid light, its somber black walls rose far overhead. Dim, throbbing music from an unseen source drifted through it.

At luxurious tables sat fully two hundred men and women, the nobles of Krann. All were dark-haired and white-skinned, and all dressed in the brief white garments, the men wearing swords. Their laughing chatter died and they stared at us as we were marched toward the raised table at one side where sat the Khal himself.

Gor Om, usurping Khal whose ancestors had long ago supplanted my own forefathers! As we faced him across the table, my heart throbbed with ancient hate of this upstart race who had for ages held my people in hideous bondage to the dark creatures of evil inside this world. And Gor Om's gaze rested on my face, drawn by my burning eyes.

Utterly gross in appearance was Gor Om, a bloated obese man of forty whose vast, flabby bulk overflowed the throne in which he sat, whose ringed, puffy hands rested as though borne down by their own weight. His thick black hair was oiled and curled, and the great rolls of fat on his face almost hid his shrewd, small black eyes. For there was shrewdness in those eyes, yes, and power in that gross, obscene body.

He shifted his gaze to the captain who had brought us and said in a thick, husky voice, "You have done well to recapture Herk Ell and Wal Az and the girl, who have long plotted with their cursed Brotherhood against me. But who is this other?"

He flicked his thumb at me. The captain explained, "We found him with the fugitives, and he fought at their side. Undoubtedly he too belongs to the Brotherhood."

"Then he shall share their fate," Gor Om stated. "At dawn the black car of the mighty ones, the Dwellers in Darkness, comes up through the sacred pit for this month's sacrifices. These four will be of the sacrifices, and will go down to meet the mighty ones."

I thought that a cold shiver ran through the gay crowd of nobles who listened, at the mention of the dreaded Dwellers in Darkness. But Gor Om was speaking on, ironical amusement on his gross face.

"Surely," he said mockingly to us, "such a quick end is better for you of the Brotherhood of the Redeemer, as you call yourselves, than to wait longer for a Redeemer who, alas, never comes."

A shout of laughter came from the listening men and women at the tables, at this jest. I saw that Herk Ell was grinding his teeth and that Lura was looking at me, her white face strange, appealing.

My own heart was seething with wrath. Yet when I spoke, I kept my voice soft.

I said, "You are wrong, Gor Om. The Brotherhood has not waited all these ages in vain."

The usurper's small eyes twinkled. "You still believe that your fabled Redeemer will come?"

I said deliberately, "The Redeemer has come."

By heaven, there was an electric hush through that vast chamber! Every soul in it was suddenly tense, leaning forward, staring at me astoundedly. Yet I kept my burning gaze on Gor Om.

The folds of fat on his bloated face wrinkled into a smile. He said, "Where is this Redeemer, then? Why does he not show himself in Zinziba?"

"He is here!" I exclaimed. And I jerked out the pentagonal symbol inside my shirt and held it up for all to see.

A great sigh went over the room. Every man and woman in it seemed frozen to stone as their eyes beheld the ancient, sacred symbol. There was utter, awed amazement on their faces.

Gor Om half raised from his seat, his small eyes bulging. In that instant, before he could control his features, I saw fear on his bloated face.

I exclaimed, "Gor Om, your rule approaches its end! Yes, and the rule of all your house that for ages has tyrannized over this world and delivered its people to the dark, evil ones. I am son to Nort Norus, the great Khal who long ago departed from this world. I have come back to reclaim his throne and destroy this evil tyranny."

And before any could stop me, I spun toward the petrified people at the tables and cried, "Nobles of Krann, you have beheld the symbol and you know that I speak truth. Rise and follow me and we will kill this obscene despot and stop the black sacrifices for ever!"

Some of the nobles leaped to their feet, and for a moment I had the wild hope that they were about to join me. But Gor Om had recovered himself and his husky voice bellowed quickly.

"Guards! Seize this impostor!"

The black-armored guards behind me seized me and my fellow prisoners instantly. And other guards came running into the chamber. The nobles remained erect, staring tensely at me.

Gor Om told them smoothly, "This is but a lying slave who comes here with his tale of being Nort Norus' descendant. Nort Norus vanished and died ages ago, as all know. This fellow has made a counterfeit symbol like the ancient lost one, and seeks to play the Redeemer."

"You lie yourself!" shouted Herk Ell, straining to get free, his craggy face crimson. "The Khal Erik tells the truth and the symbol is the true one. For well do you all know that on all this world the only gray metal like that was in the emblem worn by the ancient Khals."

Gor Om commanded, "Take them down to the dungeons. When the car of sacrifices comes up at dawn, they go into it with the other chosen ones. The Dwellers in Darkness will know how to deal

with such an impostor. Let the feast go on!"

Quickly we were dragged out of the great chamber. We were hustled through halls and corridors and then down a stair into a dimly lit lower level. Along a passage were cells with heavily barred doors, and into one of these we were thrust, the bar clanging shut outside.

The cell was a small one, utterly dark. Its only opening was a tiny window, a foot square, high in its metal wall on a level with the ground outside. Through that opening we could look up into the walled courtyard of the black pit.

Herk Ell sat his huge form down and said heavily, "It was a good try you made to stir the nobles, Khal Erik. But they feared the guards of Gor Om too much to follow you, those who wished to."

Wal Az exclaimed, "The usurper fears you, Khal Erik! He knows well that you *are* the Redeemer."

I ranged the cell like a captive wild beast. "We've got to get out of here somehow!"

"Impossible," said the old man hopelessly. "No one has ever yet escaped these dungeons, locked and with guards outside. And we've but a few hours before we go into the car of the sacrifices."

Lura spoke low-voiced from the dark corner where she sat. She whispered, "I am afraid—afraid to go down to the Dwellers in Darkness."

I sat down beside her, put my arm around her slim shoulders. She clung to me, no longer the fierce fighting maiden I had met in the jungle, but merely a shaken, frightened girl, recoiling in horror from the hideous, mysterious fate that was soon to be ours.

Bitterly I cursed my own helplessness. It came over me strongly how much blind faith she and the others had had in me, the Redeemer whose coming had been prayed for by a horror-ridden people for ages. It had been the dream of their lives that some day, somehow, I might come and deliver them from their black bondage to the dreaded things of the dark underworld. Now I had come at last, and had failed them, had shattered their age-old dream, was doomed even as they were.

4. The Car of the Sacrifices

For hours I sat wrapped in that black gloom in the equal darkness of the little cell, Lura nestled fearfully against me. There was no sound in all that time but the occasional foosteps of the two guards on watch in the outer passage.

Then Herk Ell stirred, went to the window and peered up and outward. Dawn was coming, paling the starry sky with dull pink streaks against which the looming spires of Zinziba stood out blackly.

Herk Ell said suddenly, "The car of the sacrifices comes!"

We hastened to his side, peered up through the little window into the walled courtyard of the pit. Something was coming up out of the dark, unfathomable well at the courtyard's center.

It was a strange black craft, a big disk with a low wall around its edge. There was no one on it, no sound or evidence of motive power about it, but it rose up out of the depths of the pit like a dark phantom craft and stopped, level with the pit's edge.

"Yes, the car of the sacrifices," said Wal Az with horror throbbing in his voice. "Soon we shall be on it with the other doomed ones, going down into the depths to awful doom."

Lura's slim figure trembled convulsively beside me. I tightened my arm around her, my heart swollen with futile rage.

Suddenly we all stiffened, listening.

From the passage outside the door of our cell, a low voice was whispering stealthily to us.

"Khal Erik! Khal Erik!"

I sprang to the locked door. In a low voice, I demanded, "Who is there?"

The whispering voice on the other side asked quickly, "Are you he who calls himself Khal Erik? The Redeemer?"

At my quick affirmative, the one outside swiftly unbarred and opened the door. In the dim-lit passage we beheld a half-dozen men, naked swords in their hands, their faces excited.

Wal Az exclaimed to me, "I know these men! They are of our Brotherhood!"

"Yes," said their leader. "We belong to the guards of this palace but are secret members of the Brotherhood, and resolved to free you. We killed the two sentries in this passage."

I cried, "How did you know that we were here?"

The man answered, "All Zinziba is buzzing with news that the Redeemer has returned and that Gor Om has prisoned him to be sent with the sacrifices to the evil ones. Tell me, lord, are you really the Redeemer?"

For answer, I held up the symbol around my neck. The men sank to their knees, awe in their shining eyes.

They cried, "You *are* he! We follow you to the death, Khal Erik! And all in the Brotherhood and many others too in Zinziba are ready at this moment to rise with you and overthrow Gor Om."

"We must be swift, then," I exclaimed, my blood racing with excitement. "Where are your forces? How many do they number?"

He told me, "At least ten thousand of the Brotherhood have gathered secretly outside the palace, Khal. But they cannot enter because the great palace doors are still barred, with a dozen guards inside each door. We must overcome those guards and open the doors to let the attackers in. Then with their attack all Zinziba will rise, yes, and every other city on Krann when it receives the news."

As he spoke he was handing us swords which they had brought for us. I gripped mine and cried, "Up, then, to the doors! We'll cut down the guards inside them and open to those outside!"

Herk Ell exclaimed joyfully, flourishing his sword, "Now we settle accounts with the tyrant, once and for all."

I told the girl quickly, "Lura, you stay here. I won't have you endangered in this fighting."

Her eyes flashed. "Where you go, I'll follow, Khal Erik!" There was no time to protest—action was a paramount need.

WE HURRIED out into the passage and along the dim-lit corridor, tripping over the bodies of guards whom our rescuers had slain. Then we were hastening up the winding stair that led to the ground floor of the great building.

Emerging into a great hall, lit by the reddening light of dawn, we hurried after our guides toward a door beyond which a corridor led to the great outer doors of the palace. We had just entered that corridor, when from the opposite side of the great hall we had just crossed, there came out Gor Om himself and a score of guards.

Gor Om, as they entered the hall, was ordering, "Bring the prisoners from the dungeons at once so that we may put them in the car of sacrifices. Hurry, the mighty ones below brook no delays."

Then he glimpsed us and yelled, "They are escaping! After them!"

His men leaped after us with unsheathed swords.

I cried to Herk Ell and the others, "Get to the great doors and open them

to the forces outside! Wal Az and I will hold back these guards from following you."

The giant cried, "But Khal Erik, they're too many for you——"

"Go!" I yelled fiercely at him. "Unless you manage to admit the men outside, our chance is gone!"

Herk Ell obeyed, he and our half-dozen rescuers racing down the corridor, heading toward the great doors of the palace which could not be opened to the forces without until the guards stationed inside them had been overpowered. I snatched Lura behind me, and Wal Az and I raised our swords to meet the rush of Gor Om's guards.

The obese usurper himself did not join in the attack but remained in the background, urging them on. All twenty of them came at us, but in the narrow corridor which we were defending, they could not come at us all together.

That fact was all that saved us in the first rush. Wal Az and I struck at the same time at the crowding, onrushing men, and two of them crumpled from our tearing stabs. I got another man in the neck with a lightning slice, and the rest recoiled from our fierce defense.

"Take them, cowards!" shouted Gor Om to his men, his bloated face red with rage.

"Come and try it yourself, false Khal!" I challenged.

But the guards came at us again, spurred by their master's raging order. Again blade clashed on blade, and this time Wal Az went down with a sword-thrust through his thigh.

A blade stabbed to finish him—but I knocked it up and shore the head of its wielder from his neck. Another attacker leaped inside my guard, with shortened sword raised to stab me, but Lura had snatched up Wal Az's weapon and buried it in the man's throat.

But I was fighting alone now, keeping the girl behind me, my sword ringing against the blades that sought to reach me. Then I stumbled on the slippery, blood-wet floor and before I could recover my balance, a whirling blade grazed my skull and I went down.

As I fell, a second sword pierced the flesh of my shoulder. My body nerveless, my consciousness dimmed, I saw Lura seized by the guards, though she was fighting like a wildcat.

Gor Om had hurried forward and now called to his panting men, "Go after the others who fled down this corridor!"

But at that moment came a wild shout down the long passageway, and a guard reeling and covered with blood staggered toward us yelling, "The palace is attacked! The doors have been opened and thousands of the Brotherhood are pouring in!"

Dimly I saw Gor Om's face become ghastly in its rage. He shouted, thickly, "Sound the alarm to summon my guards from all the city!"

The wounded man cried, "Khal, it is too late—all Zinziba has risen and everywhere your guards are going down before the rebels or else are joining them. They shout that the Redeemer has come, and in a few moments their hordes will reach this place. Your only safety is in flight!"

Gor Om's eyes burned with unholy, raging fires. He exclaimed to his men, "Quick, then, to the car of sacrifices! We will escape down to the Dwellers in Darkness, who will give me powers to come back with and crush these cursed rebels.

"Bring these two with you as food for the mighty ones—quickly!" he shouted.

Dimly I felt them dragging me and the struggling Lura across the hall, Gor Om's obese figure hurrying ahead with incredible speed. I tried to struggle too,

but dazed and weak from loss of blood, could make no single effort.

I could dully hear the roaring voices of a great crowd approaching from the outer parts of the pentagonal palace, and could even distinguish Herk Ell's bull voice over them, leading them on. Then Gor Om's men dragged us out of a door into the walled courtyard of the pit.

There gaped the ominous dark well, black in the ruddy light of dawn, with the low, flat car of the sacrifices floating in it level with the pavement. Hastily Lura's struggling form and my stunned, nerveless one were hustled into the car by two of Gor Om's men. The bloated usurper sprang onto the car also, but the others of his men hung back.

They cried terrifiedly, "Khal, we dare not go down into the dark underworld—we fear the Dwellers in Darkness."

Gor Om exclaimed, "The Dwellers are my friends and allies and will not harm you. They will give me weapons with which I shall return up here and quell this revolt. But if you remain here you will be slain."

They rolled their eyes in extremity of terror, and one exclaimed, "It is better to die here than to go down into the dark haunts of the mighty ones!"

At that moment Herk Ell and a raging mob of men with waving swords burst out of the tower into the courtyard. The giant saw us in the car, and he yelled and leaped forward.

Too late! At that instant, without any signal or warning, without any visible sign of guidance or motive power, the black car began to drop smoothly into the dark pit. Down and down it sank into unplumbed blackness.

Then it seemed to my dazed brain that the car turned and sped obliquely, almost horizontally, in the darkness. Through that stygian obscurity it moved under the crust of Krann, drawn and guided by the mysterious beings of these cavernous depths, bearing us on as silently and strangely as some ship of the dead.

5. *The Dwellers in Darkness*

GRADUALLY my head began to clear. I found that Lura, crouching beside me on the floor of the car, had managed to staunch the flow of blood from my wounds. I still felt dreadfully weak from loss of blood, but contrived with an effort to sit up.

And I discovered that now we could see, a little. These black depths were not wholly lightless, though on first plunging into them from the sunlight they had seemed so. There was a faint, drifting luminescence in them, an uncanny, feeble light that had its source in a weakly radioactive gas which filled the air. As my eyes accustomed themselves to it, I could discern things about me.

The two guards stood over us with swords in their hands, ready to stab us at the slightest sign of resistance. Gor Om himself hunched at the low rail of the car, gazing tensely forward. There was apprehension on the usurper's bloated face, as though he was none too sure of himself in venturing into these dreaded depths, even though the things that peopled them were his allies.

The car was moving smoothly, silently forward down a titanic natural tunnel beneath the crust of this world. High overhead vaulted its jagged roof of black rock, great stalactites pointing down like huge fingers at our passing car. An awful silence filled this buried place, as the car steadily and softly moved along it.

Lura was almost sobbing to me. "Khal Erik, I feared you were killed!"

Gor Om heard and turned, a dreadful smile on his puffy face. "You will wish that you had been killed, both of you, be-

fore long, when you face the Dwellers in Darkness."

Rage again twisted his bloated features, and he snarled, "So will they above who revolted wish they were dead when I return with weapons furnished by the mighty ones, and grind them again into submission."

Lura whispered, "He will do it, Khal Erik! He will get dark powers from the Dwellers and return above."

"Not if I can help it," I said desperately. My eyes measured the swords poised over me, estimating my chances of overcoming these men in my present weakened condition.

One of the guards had turned and was asking Gor Om fearfully, "What appearance have the mighty ones, Khal?"

Gor Om, that apprehension flickering again on his face momentarily, said, "I know not, for never have I or any other man gone down to them and returned, except my long-dead ancestor who ages ago made the great compact with them. But fear not—they will know me and they know that I am their ally."

The car continued to speed smoothly forward down that eery, dimly lit tunnel. I bunched my muscles for a desperate leap forward. I knew that nothing could save Lura and me—we could not halt or turn back the car—but I was determined that Gor Om should never return back up to reimpose his tyranny on my people.

In the next moment I would have made the desperate attack. But at that instant, the car suddenly emerged from the tunnel into a gigantic cavern, the unexpectedness of which petrified me.

Far, far overhead loomed the vaulted rock roof of that colossal chamber. Its dim depths receded out of sight ahead. And on its metal floor were looming structures and machines, strange things of purpose incalculable, crowding, grotesque metal mechanisms. And moving among them I glimpsed living creatures of some kind.

The car swept smoothly down through the feeble glow over the enigmatic machines, whose soft whirring and clicking came to our ears. The disk-shaped craft came to rest in a perfectly circular clear space on the metal floor. All around us in the faint light towered the giant mechanisms. And out onto the clear floor to meet us came——

"The Dwellers in Darkness!" exclaimed Gor Om hoarsely, his small eyes bulging terrifiedly as he saw the advancing creatures.

"Gods of Krann—save us from them!" sobbed one of his two horrified men.

I felt Lura stiffen in utter dread against me, felt my own blood chill, as I looked on those awful things advancing through the feeble glow.

The Dwellers in Darkness were—worm-creatures. Like huge white worms they were, ten feet in length and two in diameter, wriggling smoothly forward from all around us in the forest of mighty mechanisms.

But—and this was most horrible about them—they were also at the same time *man-like*. Not their hideous vermiform bodies, no, but their faces. For faces they had in the front of their upreared blunt heads, with two superhumanly huge, glowing eyes, slit-like mouths, and tiny ear-apertures. From below the blunt head projected what looked like tiny, rudimentary arms.

Gor Om, shaken with fear and horror as we were, stepped off the disk to meet the advancing Dwellers. I almost admired the obese usurper in that moment for the courage that he showed.

He said in a shaken voice to the awful, staring creatures, "Mighty ones, you who know all things must know who I am, the Khal of Krann who each month has

sent you down your sacrifices as my ancestors swore to do long ago."

One of the crowd of dreadful worm-creatures, one whose head reared higher than any of the others and who seemed their leader or spokesman, answered in a hissing voice that came strangely from its slit-like mouth.

"We know you," the thing said. "But why have you not sent down the victims this time, as usual? All our race is gathered here waiting for them as we gather each month—for though we are mighty, we are numbered only in hundreds. Where are the usual victims, and why have you come down yourself?"

Gor Om explained swiftly. "The people of my cities have risen against me. I fled down here to you, mighty ones, so that you may give to me powers with which to return and crush the revolt. Then I shall once more rule above, and again shall send down your sacrifices each month. Say, will you give me those powers?"

There was a silence, in which the obese usurper trembled in suspense. Then the leader of the Dwellers spoke.

"We will give you the powers you ask," he hissed, "powers that will enable you easily to reconquer your people. For we do not wish the sacrifices to be halted. Learn that we utilize the brains of the human victims sent down to us, adding the cortex-matter of them surgically to our own brains and thus constantly enlarging the capacity and power of our minds."

The leader of the Dwellers continued, "We can do this because our brain-matter is similar to that of humans, for the reason that *long ago we too were men.* Yes, we were a human race living on the surface of Krann, like other humans, but because of war we retreated into these dark depths and here our bodies changed and our minds developed. Now we cannot any longer venture onto the surface, for sunlight and even moonlight instantly slay us, so accustomed to the dark has our race become during the eons. Therefore the victims whose brain-matter we crave must be sent down to us from above, and for that reason we will grant you the powers that you ask."

Triumph flared in Gor Om's bloated face, and he turned to where Lura and I stood on the disk beneath the menacing swords of his guards.

He told the hideous worm-thing leader, "I have not come entirely without victims, even this time, mighty ones. These two I have brought for you."

"That is well," hissed the cool voice of the Dweller. "We will remove their brain-matter now for our use, and then will prepare for you the powerful weapons which you ask."

Lura uttered a fainting cry of horror as a group of the terrible creatures came wriggling forward to the car. I saw Gor Om grinning in evil triumph, and I was about to try to wrench a sword from one of the two guards and fight to the end, when a crazy, dreadful expedient suddenly flashed across my mind.

I cried to the Dweller leader, "Wait! Mighty ones, I can give to you a tremendous secret if you will spare me and this girl!"

And as the advancing horrors paused, I said swiftly, "The secret I can give you would enable you to leap in an instant to other worlds, from these dark caves. There must be many dark planets in the universe peopled by living creatures, and all those dark worlds would be yours to visit and conquer, then! It was by that secret that I came to Krann myself from an unthinkably distant world."

Lura cried to me in horror, "Khal Erik, you would not do such a thing—you would not loose these creatures upon other worlds merely to save ourselves?"

Gor Om snarled angrily, "This slave is lying—he did not come from another world."

The leader of the Dwellers was surveying me with his huge, glowing eyes. He hissed calmly, "The man speaks truth—he comes from another world, for I can discern many great differences between his body and that of the men of this planet."

"Yes, I speak truth," I said quickly, "and I can show you how to build a mechanism that will transfer you instantly to worlds far across the universe."

"Khal Erik, do not do it!" cried Lura brokenly.

The Dweller leader's great eyes seemed to brood on me. The creature finally said, "It would be well for us to have such power. It would give us all the dark worlds of the universe for our domain. You will show us now how to build the mechanism."

"Only if you promise to let this girl and me go free!" I reminded him.

The Dweller hissed, "You will show us how to build the mechanism. After you have shown us, you and the other victim will be treated as we treat all humans sent down to us."

"No!" I cried. "In that case, I will show you nothing."

One of the creatures at once wriggled forward with a small box-like apparatus. He simply held it toward me. And fiery, agonizing pain leaped through every nerve in my body, somehow induced electrically by the apparatus.

I gasped, "Stop—stop it! I will show you!"

The pain ceased as the apparatus was withdrawn.

Gor Om chuckled, "You thought to bargain with the mighty ones, slave—see now the results of your bargain."

I stepped off the car, into the midst of the worm-like horde. There, weak and still gasping from that moment of awful torture, I told the leader of the Dwellers the various mechanisms that would be necessary to build the dimension-crossing machine. Dwellers hurried away in all directions to bring the necessary parts, and I began instructing them in the assembly of the parts.

WEIRD, incredible scene! The vast, dim-lit cavern whose spaces stretched far away and whose rock roof vaulted high overhead. The looming, enigmatic mechanisms towering around us, and the hideous white worm-like creatures busy under my direction putting together the parts of my mechanism. The Dwellers' leader watching with his unhuman eyes, while Gor Om's obese figure waited impatiently, and while Lura shrank back and looked on my work in horror.

The Dwellers were assembling a machine that was identical with that which I had used to flash from Earth to Krann, except that it was many times larger. A huge, flat, square mechanism, it almost filled the circular clearing, and was capable of generating a force that would thrust almost any amount of matter clear out of the ordinary dimensional universe. The wild hope in my heart strengthened as the machine approached completion.

I asked the Dwellers' leader, "How thick is the rocky roof above this cavern?"

His glowing eyes fastened on mine and for a moment I thought he had become suspicious. "Why do you ask?" he hissed.

"It is necessary for me to know so that I may make allowance for its gravitational influence," I lied.

He said, "It is but a thousand feet in thickness, for these dark spaces lie close beneath the crust of Krann." Then he added, "Do not think that there is any chance of your escaping on that mechan-

ism. You will not be allowed to operate it—we will do that under your direction, the first time."

Hours had passed. It should be midday on the surface of Krann, a quarter-mile above. The great square mechanism was completed, finished in incredibly short time by these super-scientific beings. The force-producing units had been set at the points I specified.

Now, my heart beating wildly, I said, "There is one connection yet to be made —a wire between those two points."

A connection made between those two points would be equivalent to closing the switch of the mechanism. And it had been so set at my direction that the terrific radiant force from it would thrust upward and would hurl the whole roof of the cavern out of ordinary space!

A Dweller approached and began to fasten the wire as I directed. But the Dweller leader, whose huge eyes had been carefully inspecting the mechanism, suddenly hissed, "It is a trick! Do not——"

Before he could finish, the connection was made. And instantly, as the soundless, awful forces from that mechanism thrust upward, the whole rock roof of the cavern vanished, whiffed instantly outside the continuum of ordinary space!

The cavern, its roof gone, was open to the sky. And up there blazed the crimson sun, pouring a sudden blinding flood of light and heat down into these dim spaces that never before had known light.

The Dwellers in Darkness cried out wildly in hissing terror as the dazzling sunlight struck them. They tried to writhe out of it, to gain the shelter of darkness, but could not. For almost instantly their white worm-bodies were turning black. They were dying, slain by the sunlight that was fatal to their dark race.

Yes, the mad chance on which I had gambled had succeeded and all the race of the Dwellers, gathered here for their human victims, was dead now and would never again shadow this world with dread.

Gor Om and his two guards and Lura too, stood there benumbed with stupefaction in the flood of crimson sunlight. I snatched a sword from the nearest of the two men. Before I could use it, he and the other guard fled shrieking with terror away through the looming mechanisms and litter of dead black worm-bodies.

But Gor Om, even now, had the courage to draw his sword. Blade clashed on blade while Lura watched, stunned. Weak as I was, hardly able to stand, I yet pressed the obese one back and back, until a last fierce lunge sent my blade through his gross throat.

Then Lura ran to me, sobbing, "Khal Erik—look!"

She pointed up. Men mounted on rhors were winging fearfully, cautiously, down from the sunlight into the vast, newly unroofed cavern.

Their winged reptilian steeds alighted near us, and one man ran to us, shouting. It was big Herk Ell.

He cried, "Khal Erik—you're still alive! We thought you gone for ever; then a few minutes ago we saw this vast space suddenly open not far from Zinziba, and came to investigate. Gor Om——"

"Gor Om is dead," I said weakly, "and so too are the Dwellers in Darkness, dead and gone for ever."

They brought me one of the rhors and I mounted it, holding Lura tightly in front of me. With flapping of wings, we rose on our steeds up out of that place

accursed, up into the blessed air and sunlight above that vast crater that yawned now in the red jungles.

We flew straight toward Zinziba's towers. And as we winged down amid the spires toward the palace of the Khal of Krann—*my* palace—the populace saw and recognized me with wild shouts.

"The Redeemer! The Redeemer!"

And as I flew down thus to claim my heritage, Lura's quivering form was sweet and warm in my arms.

Ghost Shadows

By CLARENCE EDWIN FLYNN

Ghosts of trees at sunset
  Length'ning on the grass,
Ghosts of clouds in summer—
  I have seen them pass.

Ghosts of ships thrown seaward
  By the moonlight's glow,
Ghosts of faded blossoms—
  I have seen them go.

Ghosts of evening firelight
  Leaping on the wall,
Ghosts of dear ones passing—
  I have seen them all.

Ghosts of vanished moments
  Passing where the dew
Once was on the roses—
  I have seen them, too.

"Beyond the clouds of smoke came a stamping, a bestial treading."

The Last Pharaoh

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A strange weird novel of a castle of doom on the West African coast—an unbelievably fascinating tale of an English girl and her American sweetheart, and the amazing fate that befell them

The Story Thus Far

SHANGHAIED to a mysterious fortress on the West African coast—the Castle of Gloom—Neil Bryant and Carol Terry, together with the latter's brother, Bob, have seen and heard the two talking heads—Atma, Princess of Egypt, and Karamour, the last Pharaoh.

The surprized Terrys learn they are the descendants of Queen Hatshepsut, who ruled Egypt over three thousand years ago. They hear the centuries-old history

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

of the bodiless monarchs; of the great secret that is theirs—a knowledge that permits them to unite a head to a freshly decapitated body, and render it immune to time. Karamour tells that he and the Princess would again become whole, but must have bodies in whose veins flows the royal blood of Egypt—forms appropriate to their station.

Bryant is led to the dungeons, to be transferred later to a luxurious room in the castle. Here he is visited by the wondrous Atma, whose beauty is equaled only by her sensuousness. Bryant becomes enamored of the Egyptian, and together they plan flight.

Atma tells of the great treasure that is theirs for the taking, and the following night, accompanied by three black slaves, they ride far into the desert, where, in the dreary corridors that lie below a forgotten valley, Bryant beholds the riches and sleeping body of Balkis, Queen of Sheba. Later, the cruelty of Atma is shown as she shoots the slaves, calmly saying: "It was the only way to keep the hidden treasure of Sheba a secret for ever."

The story continues:

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17. *When the Tide Comes In*

THE little summer house at the far end of Prince Karamour's tropical garden gives a splendid view of the rolling Atlantic below. Here I had come in the early hour of the African morning that precedes the quick rising of the sun in the east.

What romantic ships of history must have sailed past that little land-locked harbor! In the dawn of time, perhaps, hollowed logs of the hairy men or the tiny craft of the Hawk kings had entered. Later, and more surely, would have been the two-sailed ships of Crete. Ages passed. Now came the Phenician traders, cursing sea-robbers of Crœsus and the great war galleys of the Cæsars rowed by naked slaves; to be followed a thousand years later by the tall, fair-haired barbarians in horned helmets, who shouted defiant war cries and drank great flagons of mead; then vessels whose sailors spoke of Elizabeth, and soldiers whose swords were drawn for Isabella. And far out over the tossing blue, but a brief century ago, the *Northumberland* had carried a short stout man, whose little cocked hat and loose gray coat with the silver star were well known throughout Europe, to a mountainous island in the south.

My reveries were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Doctor Zola, whose brisk approach on the grassy terrace had been quite noiseless. With his accustomed cheerful greeting, the immaculate Frenchman invaded my quiet retreat and seated himself on the near-by bench, looking out at the tumbling waters while he puffed his cigarette with apparent enjoyment.

I was not deceived by this show of indifference. Too well I knew the perfidious fiend not to realize that his cunning brain would always harbor treachery and deceit, that naught but trickery could be expected from him whose glib tongue had caused the capture of the unhappy Carol Terry.

"Monsieur Bryant looks tired." The dark face had suddenly turned as his eyes looked searchingly into mine.

"Tired?" I feigned a quick surprize. "Why, no, I slept rather well."

The physician gave a nasty laugh.

"Well, perhaps, but hardly long enough. As your doctor, I would prescribe regular hours, and less strenuous—shall we say?—desert travel."

I spat out an oath.

"Oh, come now, *Monsieur*, you must not growl at my advice! Surely you will

have enough explaining to do when the great one returns on the morrow. Please do not force me to darken your chance of pardon with added tales of midnight ramblings."

I rose and shrugged my shoulders.

"You speak in riddles, Doctor Zola."

His dark eyes blazed hatred. "Do you take me for a fool, *Monsieur?* Do you think that I do not know of last night's journey? Bah! Why, there's not a slave in the castle unaware of it. Believe me when I say it is best for you to desist in that stubborn attitude and confess all. Of your companion we must not speak, but of yourself, we can and will. Come now, be sensible—where did you go, and why?"

With a thrill I realized our trip to Sheba's tomb was still unknown. At his first words I feared we had been skilfully shadowed by some black rider who reported his finding to the villainous Frenchman. This question, however, told of his ignorance as to our destination.

"Zola," I answered, "you are a devil! It was your lying tongue that caused the capture of the Terrys. The evidence given in the throneroom sent Barakoff to his awful death. It was by your orders that the attempt was made on my life in the Southampton fog, and now you wish to frighten me with threats. You, a spineless poltroon! Yes, that's what you are, a poltroon—a scheming coward, whose foul tongue will never harm another."

The physician leaped to his feet.

"You may think different!" he shouted. "You may think a great deal different, my precious Monsieur Bryant. Wait until I tell the Pharaoh of his three missing blacks."

My answer was a loud laugh of ridicule. Zola turned scarlet.

"I can make another charge," he cried. "Oh, *mon Dieu,* what a charge!"

"Make as few or as many as you wish," I taunted. "It's a lying throat that utters them. And now I will take my leave. The very air becomes sickened with your presence."

Turning, I strode from the gardens, leaving the Frenchman trembling with rage.

Inwardly, I had not felt the ease exhibited to Zola. His last threat could indeed be serious. Perhaps in some strange way he had learned of my love. Once that passion became known to the Pharaoh, it sealed my doom. I hurried to the elaborate rooms of the dark-eyed charmer.

THE Princess of Egypt, sitting upright in her great bed by the open window, ate the breakfast served by the giant Zena.

"Zola!" I whispered hurriedly, as I strode to the bedside. "He has——"

"But you are up early, and alone in the gardens?" The Princess gave her musical laugh. "Luckily, I know the solitude and my powers of fascination, else I might become jealous and suspect another."

"Will you lis——"

"I have decided to take Zena with us," she continued airily. The huge black beamed and nodded happily at her words. "There is no good reason why he should be left behind, and the poor fellow worships me. I am always sure of his strength and devotion. I will find him indispensable. Besides, he possesses that greatest gift for a perfect slave—silence." Again she laughed gayly. "Shades of Osiris! the wonders of the new lands will doubtless leave him as speechless as the knives of Balkis' torturers did, thirty centuries ago."

Insistence and persuasion were ever lost on the Princess of Egypt. Not till

she had finished her meal would she hear me. Then, bidding the black to withdraw, Hatshepsut's lovely daughter made her way to the tiny balcony, the delicate sleeping-robe fluttering in the morning wind.

"And now what is this so very urgent matter you would tell your darling?" I had followed her to the small gallery.

"Zola," I cried. "He knows everything!"

The Princess of Egypt yawned lazily.

"I was talking to him in the garden just now. He knows of last night's ride—spoke of the missing blacks. Everything will be told to Karamour. The fiend will stop at nothing. He wishes me to share Barakoff's fate, and"—my voice lowered to a whisper—"and he knows about us!"

I had expected a frightened gasp at the words.

"And what if he does?" she answered in a slow, irate tone. "Is it anything that should frighten you? Besides, you seem to forget that the Prince does not return till tomorrow night, and the plane that takes us north arrives at dusk. What does the anger of the Pharaoh matter with us a thousand miles away? Let him rage and storm! Anger and wrath can be felt but little while we laugh amid the joys and gayeties of Paris.

"And now let us change the boring subject. The hours are few and much remains to be done before sundown. Forget, then, the stupid Frenchman and think only of the future. Departure in the last rays of the setting Ra means escape and security by dawn."

"But Karamour," I insisted, "he will follow."

"It matters little if he does. He will be at a loss where he must search. The blacks all fear me. They would not tell him, even if they knew."

"They may not," I answered, "but Zola——"

Atma turned her wondrous face smilingly as her arms encircled my neck.

"Your mind is still filled with the gloom of the tomb," she cried, laughing. "Surely you have need of Atma's warm caresses to bring it once more to the sunshine. Forget, now, those needless worries. Undreamed-of wealth, the nearness of your darling, and escape is but a matter of hours.

"As to your Frenchman," she added, "I have never cared for that dark fiend either. Always annoyed by his too polite poise, I have come to distrust him as well. Often I have thought that it would be best if he were to disappear. Yes, perhaps it is best that I asked him to accompany me."

I stared at her.

"You what!"

"I have asked him to go walking with me this morning at ten. Surely there is nothing so wonderful about that. Why—why, you are jealous!" she cried. "Hawks of Horus! I see the green-eyed god within your eyes.

"What a child!" she continued. "A fearless man of the new world who descends to lonely vaults of gloom, leads a mutiny at sea, defies the Pharaoh himself—and yet but a little child! Ah, suspicious one, you should know by now to trust your Atma. You should not ask, but only obey the commands of your darling. Go now to the courtyard and follow the black giant." She pushed me smilingly toward the door.

"But Zola," I protested; "will he come?"

"And the Princess of Egypt in the scantiest of apparel? Have no fear on that score. A million sharpened swords could not keep him from me."

Two miles up the beach I watched the giant Zena swing his great sledge skilfully as he drove two stakes deep into the boiling surf.

The Princess of Egypt had not divulged her intentions. To have questioned her to any length would have been to court her displeasure, and that, I had learned, was as terrible as the wondrous rapture of her charms. The tongueless slave, of course, could tell me nothing.

His work completed, with a pathetic patience the black sat silently beside me, to await I knew not what. Meditatively I watched him.

What sights, what great historical scenes had those age-old eyes beheld! He had been with Sheba at the court of Solomon, to later hold her child and heir, the tiny Bainelekhem; had watched, perhaps, the racing horse from whose sweaty sides the wise ruler had gathered the perspiration when the Queen asked him to fill the silver goblet of water "that came neither from heaven nor earth." Surely he had seen the seven hundred concubines of David's son, and had witnessed the building of the great temple, erected in the days of Israel's glory. To him were familiar the names and faces of Rehoboam and the High Priest Zadok. And then he had spoken indiscreetly of some historic intimacy, to be punished by the loss of his tongue.

Suddenly the black sprang to his feet and pointed northward. Far up the beach two figures were walking slowly toward us. It was not till they had come much nearer that I could recognize Doctor Zola in immaculate white flannels, who talked in earnest tones to a tall beauty in a dress of flaming crimson, a laughing enchantress whose sire had beaten back the invading Hyksos from northern Syria, some thirty-four hundred years ago.

Following Zena's quick example, I had sprung behind a small cluster of palms. Presently the couple came directly before us, and stopped. The man was speaking:

"Your charms become more maddening with the passing of the hours, oh daughter of Hatshepsut. Like the lovely flower that opens its soft petals to the rising sun, and sends forth its intoxicating aroma to beguile the passer-by, your beauty has made my poor head dizzy."

The girl looked at him with an amused, half-pitying smile, but the man's wild emotion had apparently blinded him to it.

"Then you—you really care?"

"Care!" he shrieked. "Care!" His tall form trembled with suppressed passion. "Oh, God of Mubethte, I adore you! The charms of Hatshepsut's daughter have enslaved me as a million thongs of iron. I have looked upon beauty, and am blinded to all else. Care! The united waters of the universe could never hope to cool my love. Take me!" he shouted. "Take my very life, if only as a toy for your slightest whim! I——" and the love-crazed man threw himself to his knees before her.

The eyes of Atma had already noticed us, and made a quick gesture to Zena. The mighty black crept swiftly upon the unsuspecting Frenchman.

The girl reached down to the moaning man before her.

"And this great love that has inflamed you," she asked softly—"to what length would you go to prove its devotion to Atma?"

The man looked imploringly at the glamorous face so close above him.

"Die for you," he moaned. "Willingly die for you."

The Princess of Egypt gave a shrill laugh, and her features changed to a bestial cruelty.

"You will die!" she snarled. "You will die, cursed spawn of hell! Die as you grovel in an agony of fear. But not

for me, oh lovable doctor—*because* of me!"

For a moment the kneeling man stared at her, and then, as though warned by some subtle sense, sprang to his feet. At the same instant, the great arms of Zena enfolded him from behind.

"Still ready to prove that love, doctor?"

In a twinkling the giant had lashed the man's arms to his side with a slender thong of rawhide. Next the wrists were securely tied, as well as the ankles. Then the black looked questioningly at his mistress.

"What do you want?" whispered Zola, for the look in Atma's eyes frightened him. "Why do you do this? Why has the black tied me? You—you do not dare to kill me!" But the last was half a question.

"There is nothing the Princess of Egypt would not dare."

As though sensing his doom, the eyes of the Frenchman glared wildly about him in a frantic search for some look of compassion.

"But my skill!" he cried. "It made you whole. You could not have done without the clever hands of Zola. Did I not take you from the great bowl that had been your tomb for centuries and endow you with perpetual life and youth? Was not mine the brain that ensnared the victims for your royal pleasure?"

Atma gave a mirthless smile.

"When I have no more use for a tool, there is but one thing to do—destroy it!"

Zola looked imploringly at me.

"He has ever been a treacherous fiend," I said, "and deserves litle mercy. Yet we dare not kill him." Still, I could never be sure of Atma, and now as the girl spoke a few sharp words to the black: "But what are you going to do?" I asked.

The query was soon answered. Presently the physician was lying on his back in the surf, securely held between the two stout stakes—a thong fastened around his neck and tied to one of them, his feet, securely held by a leather leash, attached to the other. The man had put up a violent struggle, but was like a babe in the mighty grasp of the black.

The Princess of Egypt looked down at the helpless man.

"Comfortable?" she taunted.

Mutely, I could but look on, not daring to remonstrate. The terrible anger of the royal beauty could quickly be turned against me with a fury that might result in my sharing the fate of the Frenchman. I was a spineless coward. But then, I had looked upon Atma, and a man is but a useless craven who has once felt her burning lips.

Zola's face had turned to a ghastly hue, as he gulped in a slow, agonized way.

"But I have done no wrong!" he pleaded.

"It is no fault of your own that you are still sinless, doctor," laughed the Egyptian, turning away.

Already the incoming tide was splashing around the Frenchman. Foaming and gurgling, the silvery spray had drenched the hair and clothes of our struggling victim. With a tireless monotony the blue waters would charge, only to retreat again. Yet always they returned. Slowly but surely they were rising, and the sharp eyes of the prostrate wretch had been quick to note this relentless advance.

"Stop!" he wailed. "Oh, *mon Dieu,* do not leave me! I will tell the Pharaoh nothing. I will not betray you. Do not go! Save——" and there came a horrible, gasping sound. "The water—it is choking me! It is rising!" Then, as we continued to draw farther away, his voice rose higher in hysterical panic. "Come back! Come back! Have mercy!

Do not leave me! Oh, *mon Dieu,* what have you done! What—what is to happen?"

Already we had proceeded some distance up the beach. As the shouted words of the frenzied Frenchman reached us, however, the retreating Atma turned suddenly toward him.

"You will soon have your answer," cried the crimson-clad Princess, and her voice rang far down the lonely beach. "Have patience to wait but for one short hour, and you will learn your fate—when the tide comes in!"

SLOWLY the long day dragged. In the afternoon the great Zena had ridden off to the north, where, at a spot designated, he would await the second return of the ship that would convey him to Tangier and his mistress. From there we were to proceed to Paris—the spot on which the Princess had set her heart. Already Atma and I had prepared our own departure, and now, in the last rays of the setting sun, we stood on the tiny balcony, awaiting the return of the skull-ensigned ship. Atma was speaking:

"Morning should find us safe in Tangier, and well on the road to freedom. At best we need but nine short hours to make it, while the long miles of sand and hillocks mean weeks of travel for any pursuing horsemen. There can be no danger of discovery. The black soldiery have been ordered to hidden Ybot, and the few remaining slaves do not know our destination. Even if they did, they would lose their tongues rather than betray me."

There was a world of assurance in her voice, yet somehow I could not share it. During the past five days I had heard and seen too much of Karamour to expect the grim Pharaoh to accept submissively this flight of Hatshepsut's daughter. Knowing, as I did, the wild plan to rule his ancient country once more with Atma as his queen, it would not have surprized me were he to gather his thousands of fanatical followers and attack the great stronghold of Tangier itself, in his efforts to regain her. And if in some strange manner he had learned of our plans and returned before the expected plane—what then? The pit perhaps, or maybe worse. A chill came over me as I realized how utterly helpless we would be. At that moment I raised my eyes, and there were the cruel Pharaoh and his cutthroat followers riding over the desert.

The land beyond the castle of gloom is a desolate stretch of country with countless hillocks, ravines and tiny valleys. It was from the mouth of one of these that the swarthy horsemen were now emerging. When I caught that first sight of them they were still a good half-mile away.

Atma, ever watchful, had seen them almost as soon as I.

"It's Karamour!" she whispered. "Karamour and his raiders returning from the desert!"

"But why now?" I gasped.

She narrowed her eyes in thought.

"I do not know," she admitted. "It could be a coincidence, or he may have heard. If only I were certain as to which it was!"

For a moment she watched the approaching Arabs, then turned toward me in a determined manner. "However, the fact remains that they are here, and we must make the best of it. It is needless for me to say that you are to deny everything. Stay here in your room. I will find out the reason for this unexpected return and let you know later. It could have been chance that brought them, and who knows but we may yet leave ere the rising of Ra?"

The Princess of Egypt had hurried to the door as she spoke, and now turned

for a parting caress. I kissed the perfect mouth, and had raised the lovely hands to my lips when my eyes beheld a small, familiar scar.

There, on the slender left wrist, a dark semicircle glared angrily—a tiny blue-black mark that unmistakably formed the letter C—the little blemish whose origin had been so blithely told to me on the great ocean liner—the scar I had seen on the wrist of Carol Terry!

And then—I knew! Knew for a certainty that horrible thing I had vaguely suspected, yet never dared believe. The head on the bowl—a skilled doctor! The talk of eternal life, and the repeated words of becoming whole! It was clear! This weird creature that stood before me had indeed the beautiful face that once aroused the passions of men who fought and died in the shadows of the pyramids, four centuries and three thousand years ago. True, that shapely head might have been destined to wear the ancient crown of Egypt, but the body—the body was that of Carol Terry!

Atma was staring quizzically at me, unaware of the gruesome discovery.

"Great God!" I shrieked, "you——" And then, for the first and only time in my life, I fainted.

18. A World Gone Mad

"THE world is doomed! Mighty nations shall be humbled to the dust! Chaos and death for a short ninety days, and then once more in triumphant splendor, an Oekheperkere shall rule from a jewel-inlaid throne. The great cities, the seats of learning and so-called civilization that is ever the boast of the new lands, I now hold helpless in the hollow of my hand. Again the laws of the ancients shall govern, and with their return must the worship of the old world be restored. Once more shall the nations bow low to the scorpion, to speak in awed whispers of Isis and Osiris, to relate to the millions yet unborn the many legends of Horus and the wicked Seth. My power has become as unlimited as space, and mankind itself can at my behest be swept to a dark oblivion!" So rang the voice of Karamour, last of the Pharaohs.

Soon after his unexpected arrival, the Prince of Egypt had sent for me, and following the summons of a black slave I was taken to a small chamber where he sat. Darkness had fallen, but the small study was brilliantly lighted. Two giant negroes stood on guard at the doorway.

The son of Thothmes wasted little time in salutation. Like one who has a distasteful task before him and wishes it done as quickly as possible, he waived all preliminaries.

"Unusual circumstances have brought you here," he began, as the slave withdrew, "unintentional on your part, perhaps, but nevertheless it forces an undesired intrusion. You witnessed the fate of the mutineers on the yacht, I understand. The bones of the treacherous Russian you will find at the bottom of the pit. The question that now arises is how we can best dispose of you."

It was not a cheerful speech, nor did the grim manner with which it was uttered help to enliven it. Now, however, he leaned forward, and I could see a real intensity in those flaming eyes.

"Perhaps you might suggest a course."

"Freedom and an escort to the nearest civilized outpost." I made the demand without the slightest hope for its success. I had long since come to realize that tenderness and mercy were virtues unknown to the Pharaoh, who was wont to employ in all his dealings the doubtful justice of antiquity.

Karamour gave a mirthless laugh.

"A merciful boon, but hardly a prac-

tical one. After all, I am not yet ready to announce my findings to an unsuspecting world; and when I do so, it will be with vapors of death, rather than a verbal warning. No, I think I know a better solution. Suppose you listen while I briefly outline my own intentions; it may aid in helping your decision.

"From the first I have known that the restoration of Egyptian supremacy could never be accomplished by man power. We are too few in number to hope for success by physical force. Again, there are your great guns, your mighty fleets and powerful aircraft that drop swift death and destruction from the clouds. Nay, warfare could result in but hideous failure—and yet, I could hardly expect a given consent. No country would voluntarily surrender its rights and privileges to flatten at my behest, simply because I so desired it. There could be but one answer—mental surrender!"

Not for an instant did his dark eyes leave mine.

"Professor Sergine, of Moscow, whose stunted body possesses the cleverest brain in all Europe, has labored some nine years in a tireless quest. His experiments were first tried on animals, and later on some deserting legionnaires we captured beyond Morocco. To speak of them at any length would be wearying. Suffice to say, that at last he has perfected Zaxium—a liquid vapor that permanently destroys the human mind."

The Pharaoh arose, and with flashing eyes leaned toward me, striking the desk with his powerful fist.

"Think! Think, man, what it means! The Zaxium is placed in large metal vials and buried some few feet below the earth. In six weeks the fluid will eat its way out of the shell, and rise up from the ground to form a blue vapor, penetrating for a hundred miles in all directions, and giving instant insanity to those who once breathe of its sweet aroma.

"Secret agents will plant the deadly shells in all parts of the new lands, and then have ample time to embark for the motherland before the fluid has freed itself from the vials.

"Picture, if you can, the people of the world—of your own land—three short months from now. Unaware of the danger, they will suspect nothing, and breathe freely of the harmless-looking blue fog that is drifting toward them. All humanity will be reached by the vapors, and then—chaos! Great engines running to their destruction, manned by brainless humans who an instant before were reasoning, intelligent men. Constant roaring of giant motors. The endless crashing of the numerous small vehicles in the street. The breaking of glass, the shattering of houses! Wandering, expressionless people who do not even know how to feed themselves, walking aimlessly while strength yet remains, then falling, to wait with pathetic silence till death finally releases them from their suffering. The toppling of your giant buildings! Grinding—wrenching of steel—crashing! Fires breaking out to hide with black clouds of smoke the horrible scenes that are being enacted beneath! A universe of destruction! A world gone mad!

"For ninety days shall the blue vapors linger, but long before they disappear, mankind shall have vanished. Egypt, alone, will remain untouched, and again shall a true son of the Pharaohs rule the world's oldest civilization. The few surviving thousands, the chosen of Karamour, shall be nestled around the Mediterranean and the far-reaching Nile, that once, in the dawn of history, was the cradle of humanity. There I shall reign in security and peace, over a nation that has reverted to the ways and customs of its ancestors. In ages to come, perhaps,

my people may migrate to the other lands which will be littered with the blackened ruins and bones of those who fell before the Zaxium. That, however," he concluded, "is looking far into the future."

THE words did not frighten me, though the wild stare of the Pharaoh did. Here was one who would always be a menace to humanity. The long centuries of his gruesome imprisonment had so embittered that evil mind as to poison all thoughts of clemency. Unquestioned supremacy alone would satisfy him; while his royal lineage and powerful oratory—enough to arouse the frenzy of the desert tribesmen and surround him with thousands of fanatical followers—marked him as a modern Attila, well deserving that infamous title given the cruel Hun invader fifteen centuries ago: "The Scourge of God."

Warily I sought an understanding, not daring a remonstrance to his wild scheming.

"But myself—I am still in the dark as to your intentions concerning me."

The Pharaoh looked thoughtfully at the great ring encircling his finger.

"I have need," he answered, at length, "of a few men, white men of the new world, who can be intrusted with the secrets of the great cause. To each will be allotted certain territories, where they can plant the innocent-looking vials at intervals of a hundred miles. With a caution that will arouse no suspicion, they will surround the countrysides with the hidden Zaxium, and then have ample time to embark for Egypt before the first maddening mist has risen. For service such as this they will earn the undying gratitude of Karamour."

For a moment I stared at him.

"And you wish—you think I would have any part in such a fiendish plan?"

"I think you are sane enough to realize that it is your one hope."

It was only with an effort that I could keep my hands from flying to the throat of that great villain.

"And if I refuse?"

The dark eyes narrowed to nasty slits.

"We will talk of that, if you do," he answered in a menacing tone; "but I hardly think you will. Your past actions have shown you to be a headstrong fool; yet I do not think you are dupe enough to risk my displeasure with a refusal that can in no way benefit your country, and will subject you to the tortures of the pit."

The Prince of Egypt had risen, and was watching me intently.

"However, there is no hurry for your answer. My chieftains meet again in the throneroom, four days hence. By then you will have decided. Meanwhile," Karamour gave a mirthless smile, "come with me to the laboratory of Sergine. What you will witness there may hasten your decision."

Down a long spiral stairway and on through winding corridors of gloom I followed the Pharaoh, to enter at last a subterranean chamber. In the center of the large room, a thick glass enclosure some ten feet square rose to the ceiling. In one corner two black slaves held a struggling young woman, while near by a small man bent over a table strewn with flasks and vials. The tiny figure turned at our entrance.

My gasp of surprize was involuntary. Never before had I seen such an odd creature. His shrunken body was that of a dwarf, yet the head appeared so large as to be a deformity. The fingers of both hands had been lopped off in a ragged manner, and the sight of the two protruding sponge-like stubs was sickening. A thin coat of rusty black hung from his frail shoulders. The imprisoned girl was

staring at the midget in loathing and disgust.

At our sudden appearance, the captive turned toward the Egyptian.

"You will explain the meaning of this outrage," she demanded. "I am Lady Evelyn Blandon, of London, and have been abducted from my yacht and brought here by force. If it is ransom——"

The little man was bowing low before the Pharaoh.

"A thousand welcomes, my master," he greeted in a shrill, singsong voice. "You have indeed chosen a most opportune moment for your visit. Far beyond Dakar, the raiders secured one whose high intelligence and spirit should make a splendid subject for the blue vapors. Despite the unwillingness of the lady, I was about to indulge in that very test."

The toothless gums gave a high cackle. "Ah, but she has the courage of a Spartan!"

The Pharaoh had crossed to the table and picked up a tiny vial. Now, in answer to his command, the two blacks shoved the fair captive forward. In spite of her frantic resistance she was soon within the glass inclosure. Karamour then uncorked the small bottle, and tossing it in beside the prisoner, quickly closed the heavy door.

"It is well, Professor Sergine," he spoke to the little man. "We will now see if the Zaxium deadens the mind of the refined with the same quickness as that of the lower orders. Observe this," he commanded, turning to me, "and as you value your life, make no attempt to interfere."

Within the glass enclosure, the girl had retreated to the farthest corner, and was looking with fear-widened eyes at the tiny vial from which a light bluish vapor was already emerging. Slowly it rose, to penetrate all corners of that transparent cell, reaching at last the crouching victim who had sunk to her knees in an agony of fright. The gruesome Sergine gave a throaty chuckle as he looked on, fascinated by the dreadful scene.

Then came the change. The floating mists seemed scarcely to touch her, as the girl rose jerkily to her feet. Her lovely face, gleaming white and beautiful in the blueness, had suddenly lost its fear. Gone was the terror, the panic, and every human emotion. The countenance was entirely devoid of expression, while the eyes stared unblinkingly ahead in stupid, pathetic misery. The little man turned to the Pharaoh with a smile.

"Not long, not long, my master. The wonderful Zaxium works with the same speed and destruction on one mind as it does on another. The brain of the proud Lady Blandon is now as dead as Cheops."

Karamour gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Quite right, Little One. It is indeed a glorious weapon you have given to the great cause, and——" but even as he spoke the words, I had sprung for the Egyptian ruler.

A long left hook caught the last of the Pharaohs high on the side of the face, and then, as the head bent slightly forward, and the tiny assembly gasped in paralyzed horror, a perfectly timed right cross crashed into the royal chin. Wordless, the son of Thothmes toppled to the floor.

For an instant there was a startled silence; then, with hoarse shouts of rage, the two slaves sprang toward the rash mortal who had dared profane their king. The grotesque dwarf, screaming wildly for help, toddled from the chamber, his short legs making a frantic bid for speed.

The anger of the charging blacks was appalling. Adoring the fallen Karamour as a Mameluke might his prophet, their

savage jaws had opened in a hissing frenzy of hate, as they sought to tear me asunder with their sharp teeth and nails.

Selecting the most formidable of the pair, a tall, evil-looking fellow, I rushed forward to meet him, and swaying beneath the outstretched arms, caught the man a terrific blow that dropped him in his tracks.

In an instant the second had encircled me in his powerful arms, but in such a manner that my own were free. Thrashing and whirling with ever-increasing fury, we wrestled around the room as I sought to rid myself of that vise-like grip. The tiny table fell in our way, to crash with a violence that sent the numerous bottles and vials sliding noisily to the stone floor.

From the tail of my eye I could still see the lovely victim within the glass enclosure. Jerkily, slowly the poor mindless creature was walking aimlessly about, colliding with the hard walls of her transparent cell with a brutal roughness that had changed the nose and face to a bleeding mass. Yet never for an instant did she betray pain or anguish. Always that look was the same; a blank expressionless stare, as she continued her mechanical march, only to strike and fall once more before the thick, unyielding glass.

Like well-oiled pistols, my flailing arms were sending a steady rain of blows to the black's midriff—wicked, chopping punches, the kind that soon take the fight out of a man. A continual groaning came from the lips of my assailant. Slowly his grip grew weaker, yet, with the persistence of a bulldog, he continued to hold me in that stubborn embrace.

Loud shouts and hurrying footsteps, sounding from the corridors without, told of the oncoming hordes of Karamour. A speedy victory over the black was my one forlorn hope. During our desperate struggle we had completely circled the laboratory, and now wrestled directly above my first foe, who was already rising groggily to his knees.

The cries came ever nearer. With a supreme effort, I struck four crushing blows, and behind them was the last ounce of my fast-failing strength. I felt the clinging body suddenly go limp; the black arms fell lifelessly from me. And then, as the man sank weakly to the floor, the first of the Arab raiders poured through the doorway.

19. The Horror of the Tower

As THE wild-eyed Arabs sprang into the subterranean laboratory of the grotesque Russian scientist, I hardened my heart for the supreme struggle. But there was no fight—they simply submerged me with their numbers. Helpless, I was held in the strong grip of the nomads, while a bearded old sheik assisted Karamour to his feet. The Pharaoh, one hand holding his bleeding jaw, had gone white with rage.

"For what you have done"—the trembling tone was almost inaudible—"you must die! Three days hence, when my chiefs have returned, again shall the small creatures of the pit feed well."

The corridor was choked with the white-robed fanatics who had sped to the aid of their leader.

"Call off the Arabs!" I shouted, struggling. "Call off your desert raiders, oh boastful monarch of the ages! Does the brave ruler from the past fear one man's strength? Will the proud Karamour, who speaks always of his own great deeds and valor, refuse the challenge of a humble captive? Call off the Arabs! Step out alone and face me in honorable combat if you dare—cowardly, slinking half-thing!"

The Pharaoh spat in my defenseless face.

"So you know!" he shouted. "Perhaps you should learn more—perhaps I should take you to the lonely tower itself, where your white-skinned companions could enlighten you with the details. Better still, I might arrange for you to join them." And then, with a sneer: "To the pits!" he added.

For the past few minutes I had been aware of a dull tramping sound far above us, a steadily increasing beating that might have been the tread of marching men. Faintly it reached the underground vault, that grim, soulless pounding.

For a moment the cruel horde paused in attentive silence, and then the face of the Pharaoh lighted as he realized its significance.

"To the balcony!" he cried. "First let the captive behold the victims of the blue vapors. There he may feast his eyes, glut his soul on a sight that will tell of the power and cruelty that is Karamour's!"

FROM the small gallery I could look down into the torch-lit courtyard where marched the victims of the dreaded Zaxium. There must have been a hundred of them, European men and women from all walks of life; waylaid travelers, captured traders and merchants of the semi-civilized coast towns and outposts of the Sahara. A few ragged legionnaires, a dozen Arabs from hostile tribes and a score or so of naked blacks completed that gruesome procession. Expressionless, the faces lighted by the torches in the hands of three mounted raiders, the awful company, bound wrist to wrist on a long slave-chain, were mechanically following the horsemen out of the courtyard and on over the distant wastelands to the south.

"The dead! The march of the dead!" whispered one of my captors in a hushed voice. "They are taking those whose minds have been slain by the blue fogs to the sand-hills beyond the lost oasis, where they will tie and leave them to the jackals and prowling night creatures."

No shouts, no speaking arose from that dreadful column. Only once I heard them laugh. A naked negress fell to the hard stones of the courtyard, dragging three or four others with her. Some Arabs laughed loudly at the mishap, and the terrible sound crackled down the line like a *feu de joie*. I have heard many a scream and groan in my life, but nothing so horrible as the awful laugh that came from the marching ranks of the dead.

And then my captors led me to the cold pits of blackness far under the age-old castle of Karamour.

FOR two days I lay in the clasp of the iron chains that hung from the rocky walls of the gloomy dungeon. No sound came to me from the outside world, and light appeared only at the brief intervals that marked the entrance of my jailer.

On his last visit the black brought a small note he had concealed in his mouth, and holding the flaming torch low, allowed me to decipher its meaning.

"You are a fool" (it read) "and well deserve the death allotted by the Pharaoh. Yet if you would return to the sunlight and the warm arms of Atma, rather than the terrors of the pit, send an answer by the bearer of this missive."

A curse was my response to this offer of freedom.

"You may tell your mistress," I informed the black, as I tore the paper to bits, "that I prefer the mercies of the pit."

The hours that followed were a mental hell of torture. Not for an instant did I

regret my reply to the messenger. The loathing I now felt for the Egyptian Princess could never be penned. A woman? No, a thing! An indescribably beautiful thing of evil, who had murmured soft whispers to a conquering ruler thousands of years ago, and yet whose lovely body was that of a sweet English maiden hardly nineteen.

And Carol? What had been the fate of the blue-eyed girl I had hoped would one day be my wife? Slain that the chosen of Karamour might reign beside him. Tortured, too, perhaps, and if—at that instant I believe my mind was tottering on the verge of sanity, when a distant thud came to my ears.

It was my jailer bringing me food or the summons to the pit. Perhaps the chosen of Karamour had at last returned, and I must now be plunged to my horrible doom.

But the approaching footsteps did not find me idle. With the cunning of a madman I conceived a bold plan for escape. Stretching to my full length on the moist sands of the pit, I put one hand to my throat and half protruded my tongue like one who had been seized in some horrible convulsion. Behind me, in my right hand, I held enough slack chain to form a deadly bludgeon. Then, in dreadful suspense, I waited.

The steps were closer, as the door, that massive barrier at the far end of the vault, was slowly pushed backward. Through half-closed eyes I could see the glare of my jailer's torch. The man came nearer, and stopped. I heard a sharp gasp of surprize, and the the tall form bent swiftly toward me. At the same instant I swung the heavy chain aloft, and it crashed upon the skull of the unfortunate black.

A quick search soon found me the key to the massive lock that held me. Pausing only to free myself, I seized the fallen torch, and stepping over the silent form made a noiseless ascent of the stairs to the great corridors above.

As I entered the hallway, my tread became cautious. Here would be my greatest danger. I had already decided, as my first step, to gain entrance to the room where I had concealed the Luger pistol. With the support of this powerful ally, my chances of freedom would be greatly enhanced. Quietly I stole down the deserted corridor, each instant expecting the dreaded "Halt" of some vigilant sentry.

At the great stairway, two armed blacks stood at watch. Coming nearer, I could hear fragments of their low whispers. Luckily, they were speaking in French, which I understand fairly well.

"The great one has said that the warriors will return tomorrow," spoke one. "Let us hope it is so; we shall then be relieved of these long hours of watching."

"Cease your grumbling, Utumba," chided the other, "before the sharp ears of the Master hear your wailings and he severs your complaining tongue. Surely you must expect longer labors in the absence of the warriors. Be thankful—their returning means wine and celebration."

"But the five others—why were they dispatched to the north?" continued the first, doggedly. "Never in all my long years have I seen the castle so deserted. But for the Arab, a stable groom and Buamba, keeper of the pits, there is none, save you and me, to guard the royal ones. Indeed, do I not have to prepare the morning meal for both the master and our Princess?"

Softly I withdrew to the darkened entrance of a small room on my right. I had heard enough to realize that the castle would be poorly guarded this night. Could I but reach the room above,

there should be a fighting chance for liberty. The two guards at the stairs were sufficient to halt any unarmed intrusion from within; so walking to the open windows at the far end of the chamber, I stepped out onto the silent terrace.

The lovely gardens of Karamour were bathed in the rays of a tropical moon. High overhead towered the outlines of the castle of gloom. Only an occasional twinkle illuminated the ancient structure, proof in itself as to the number of the inhabitants. But the balcony I sought was on the northern side of the fortress, and it was toward that tiny gallery I had started when my attention was attracted by a slight shaking of the shrubbery. Instantly I cowered against the trunk of a palm-tree, and sought to hide myself in its slender shadow.

For a moment there was silence; then, with the snapping of tiny branches and rustling leaves, the thick hedge was parted to disclose a man's figure, his body crouched, his head advanced, the black barrel of a heavy automatic protruding. Softly he crept forward, pausing once or twice to listen, only to advance again till he came abreast of me. Then, as though warned by some subtle sense, he turned his wandering gaze directly on me.

"God!" he gasped, and his eyes went wide, "but you—you are not an Arab!" The tone was one of wonderment, though he held his revolver in a menacing manner.

Plainly the man was in the last stages of exhaustion. His haggard face and torn clothing were grime-covered, as a wheezing gasp was continually pushed from the frail chest. In the center of his white shirt was a large crimson blotch.

"Who are you?" he asked.

I had raised my palm in the universal sign of peace.

"Sh!" I cautioned, stepping gingerly forward. "You are safe—I am not one of them. For days I have been held as a prisoner, and only now have managed to escape from the pits. It is there that they hold unruly captives or those awaiting the call of death. But you are a stranger. What has brought you over the dreary wastes to these halls of death?"

The man gave a short sigh and sank to the ground. He waved my attentions aside with a ghastly smile.

"No use—I'm done for—used up. My wound has been getting worse. For three days I followed them—horse gave out two miles back!"

I could only look my sympathy, but he, though life was swiftly ebbing, thought only of the mission that had brought him to his death.

"They boarded the yacht as we anchored in a little harbor down the coast. Killed all the crew and guests—except her. I followed them—but——" His voice sank to a whisper. For a mement there was silence, then: "Lady Blandon—where is she?"

"You know her?" I asked.

"I love her!" And the dying form shook with emotion.

I could not bring myself to tell the hideous fate of the lovely English beauty.

"She is safe," I lied. "She is safe in the castle—she has not been harmed."

I could see the end was near, and I bent low to catch his words.

"I am happy to know it," he gasped. "Tell her—tell her I tried hard—so hard to get here sooner, but it was far—the night was cold—cold——" With the words his head dropped back, a short gasp escaped his lips; then he lay quite still.

It was some time before I could bring myself to leave this gallant fellow who had given his life so vainly. For three days he had endured the tortures of his wound and the heat of the desert, yet had gone on while life remained. Woefully unequipped (the revolver was empty), yet nothing could keep him from one to whom love and sacrifice, as well as all else, would for ever be a blank. Tears were in my eyes as I rose to leave the silent form.

Under the tiny balcony that led to my own room, I halted. Stout vines that had grown along the sides of the walls for centuries provided an excellent ladder. To scale the leafy frame was but the work of a moment. Soon I stood in the frail alcove, and an instant later had grasped the hard outlines of my hidden Luger.

A death-like silence prevailed. I had been most cautious in my climb, always fearing the watchful eyes of some chance sentinel, but now I recalled the words of the guard at the stairs: "Save the stable boy, the Arab and Buamba the jailer, there is none other but you and me to guard the royal ones."

For a while I meditated what course to pursue. The sacrifice of the poor fellow in the gardens awakened the responsibilities I still owed the Terrys. It was imperative that I pass all guards and come in contact with him whose avarice and cruelty had caused their destruction. To disarm the two sentries at the stairs should be a simple matter, and I had started to descend the vines to re-enter the palace and make the attempt, when my eyes fell on the twinkling from the tower overhead.

Often I had noticed it during the past few days; an observation tower, no doubt, where one could look far out to the sandy wastes or the sea below. Once I had mentioned it to Atma, who told me the Prince used it for just such a purpose. But now as I gazed at the light above, it seemed as though it was for a more sinister use. And then, the words of Karamour: "Perhaps I should take you to the lonely tower itself, where your white-skinned companions could enlighten you with the details."

Could it be that there was still something in that silent edifice I should know? Some knowledge, or a hope, perhaps? The last thought was enough to halt my descent. Only for an instant I hesitated, and then began a careful climb to the lofty abode.

To scale the roof from my balcony was a simple matter. It was not until I had arrived at the base of the tower that I realized the difficulty of the ascent. The weird formation of the structure made climbing an almost impossible task. Projecting cylindrical stones, some eight inches in diameter, surrounded the edifice in a series of bands at five-foot intervals.

The protruding stones gave a fairly good handhold, and for the first forty feet of the climb I encountered no great difficulty. The night was clear, and the bright moon helped to illuminate the structure. Slowly I would pull myself upward to the sturdy stubs, and swinging one leg onto the edges as a support, would reach with my hand for the series above, and in like manner ascend to the upper tier.

Twenty feet from the summit the projecting cylinders suddenly lessened to a scant four inches, with the intervals increasing to some six and a half feet apart. Frantic straining could but encircle three fingers on each of the tiny stones. An inch one way or the other would have meant my destruction. So small was my grip, a cough might have dislodged me. And then, by some hellish prank of fate, a slight wind arose from the ocean, to

sweep past the edifice in choppy, swishing gusts.

I glanced downward. The great tower protruded as it rose, and a fall would mean I should completely miss the roof and be dashed on the stones of the courtyard, a hundred feet below. I had discarded my shoes to grasp the cylinders better, and now, as my toes strained wildly to hold the tiny edges, I flattened my body against the cold structure to arise jerkily and swing my arms to the stones above. Twice I was successful, and clinging frantically, could see the protruding window-ledge and safety but scant six feet above.

The evil wind sought to dislodge me as I raised my flattened body, but ever did I come nearer to my goal. Now my hand crept cautiously overhead for the friendly ledge. A prayer rose to my lips as I felt the hard outlines brush my fingers. I had made it! I was safe!

And then my toes suddenly weakened from the terrible strain, and I toppled backward to the death and darkness below.

Six feet! Six feet only did I fall, and then my outflung hands grasped the very cylinders my toes had slipped from. For a moment I hung there, swaying in the starlight as the cold sweat broke from my body. By the barest fraction I had saved myself from a hideous death on the rocks below.

I pulled myself weakly upward. Once more would I attempt that dangerous climb; indeed I had no other choice. Already were my arms so spent as to make retreat impossible. I could never hope to reach the distant tower base. There was but one choice: success or death!

For the last time I put my feet on the slightly protruding stones as I rose to my full height. Now I stood upright, and my hand crept slowly to the sill above. Flattened against the cold sides, I could hear the whistling of an oncoming gust of wind.

I started to sway! My straining toes pushed forward till the blood gushed from the tender skin. Not for long would they stand that awful strain. And then, with a dread, sickening sensation, I could feel my right foot slowly slipping from the tiny ledge. The strong winds were forcing me backward, and I was giddy and nearly senseless. It was the end! One second more and—and then my reaching hand found a secure hold on the window-sill above.

Far below me the great Atlantic shimmered in the moonlight. The cruel rocks of the courtyard were cold and distant. It seemed incredible that I had made that dangerous climb, and at last had the well-guarded secret of the tower before me.

For a long moment I paused to rest; then pulling myself upward, I gazed into a dimly lit chamber, a bleak, desolate little place, whose sole furniture consisted of two thick pedestals topped by great stone bowls, similar to those I had seen in the throneroom. The lonely abode seemed deserted, when suddenly, with a gasp of horror, I realized that from each of the bowls there protruded a human head!

I pressed closer to the glass, with the glare of an idiot. Within the room four eyes were turned toward me in hopeless misery, and as the blood in my veins turned to water, I recognized the heads. They were Carol and Bob Terry!

20. While Flames Mount Skyward

HIGH overhead in the clear African night the distant stars flashed green and crimson. An eery quiet had fallen on the wastelands. Only the murmur of the sea, the rustling vines in the wind, and once the far-off wail of a prowling jackal,

came softly to my ears, as with revolver ready I made a cautious descent of the great stairway that led to the golden-floored throneroom of Karamour, last of the Pharaohs.

The two black guards below were blissfully unaware of my approach. Chuckling in good-natured banter, they failed to hear the silent advance of this wild-eyed invader, and the sharp command that suddenly hissed above them must have been startling.

"Raise your hands!"

The two sentries wheeled quickly. Four black hands shot upward.

"Where is your Pharaoh?"

The two men stared at me in speechless wonderment.

"Answer me!" I snapped, and the fingers of my gun hand tightened slightly. "Where is he? Be truthful, and you may trust me, but heaven help you if you lie!"

Small as the movement had been, its significance had not escaped them. For an instant there was silence; then one, the shorter of the pair, gave a frightened gulp, and pointed down the hallway. "The—the hall of meals," he whispered.

"The truth!" I demanded.

"Yes, yes, Bwana," gasped the other, as I stepped nearer. "It is indeed as Utumba says. The royal one and the Arab chieftain dine alone in the room beyond the pillars."

It was evident that the frightened blacks spoke the truth. Adorning the high walls were many leather hangings. It was the work of but a few minutes to tear one of these to strips and lash the blacks securely to a pillar.

A horrible nausea seized me. For a few moments I had to sit with my head in my hands beside my captives. But there was no time for rest. Each passing instant added to my peril. Perhaps the guards and Arabs were even now speeding to the succor of their Pharaoh. Quietly I stole down the long corridor.

Before the massive doors that led to the banquet hall I halted. Here would be my greatest danger. A complete surprize of those within was my one chance of success. Placing my ear against the portals, I listened for some sound that might assure me of the presence of the Pharaoh. No noise came from beyond the barriers, however; so taking courage, and with ready revolver, I pushed back the doors and sprang into the room.

Before a long table sat the Prince of Egypt and a stout bewhiskered Arab; the latter leaning forward in a strained posture as he talked in low tones to his ruler. The brilliantly lit room showed no other occupant.

At the sound of my entrance both men sprang to their feet.

"Curse of the dynasties!" gasped the Pharaoh. "You!"

"Sit down!" I hissed. So low was the voice they could hardly catch the words, but the tone sent Karamour to the chair and kept the Arab in his.

"I have killed my jailer and escaped to scale the tower," I continued in the same low voice; "so you know why I am here!"

THE Pharaoh was watching me with a surprized, quizzical stare that was rapidly changing to fear.

"What do you want?" he whispered. "You—you have come to kill me?" The man gave an involuntary cringe. "You are going to shoot me? No! No, you must not! You dare not! My warriors are coming. They will torture you if you do!"

"I dare kill you," I had answered, and stepped nearer to the terrorized man. "I dare kill you, and no thought of torture can prevent it. It is a simple matter to be many miles away before dawn brings a

return of the desert raiders. But this does not influence me. The pleasure of ridding the earth of one like you would more than compensate for any punishment they could ever inflict on me."

The nerves of the Pharaoh were keyed to the breaking-point, while the Arab had assumed a truculent air. Now with a great show of bravado, the swarthy chieftain rose as though to disarm me. My answer, a shot from the Luger that hissed hot lead within an inch of his face, sent him tumbling into his chair.

"Death comes quickly to the one who touches me," I warned. "And resistance to my wishes means a speedy flight to the hall of your ancestors. I have gone too far to be halted by bloodshed. If you would save your life, oh Pharaoh, heed well my words:

"You will write an edict to all desert tribes, saying you have abandoned your plans of a world supremacy for Egypt. You will dispatch riders with these missives to all douars and tribesmen that await your summons. You will descend with me to the laboratories of the Russian, and destroy all vials and formulas that might endanger mankind. No, that is not all. You will then assist me in that most important task—the firing and razing of these ancient portals."

As I spoke, the two men had glared at me, but offered no remonstrance. Now, however, the Pharaoh leaned forward, a cunning smile on his lips as the dark eyes stared at mine in a fierce intensity.

"You do not realize your horrible blasphemy," he answered softly. "True, I have taken the earthly shells of your companions, but what is that to an eternal rule of the Oekheperkere? If you are sane, you will see it in the true light. Their sacrifice has not been in vain. Come, now, be sensible. Once I offered you a commission in the ranks of the chosen, and you spurned it—a chance that might have raised you high in the eyes of Karamour, and in time earned an endowment of the precious golden oil itself. But all is not lost—again I ask for your services. Pledge me your word of obedience and loyalty to the cause, and you will find me willing to forget your rash words and profane actions."

I was wondering why the Pharaoh had taken such lengthy pains to explain all this to me. None knew better than he that I would never be other than a foe. Nor could any soft words beguile me into thinking the grim ruler wished other than my death. No, there must be something else behind it all, some ruse that would gain him the upper hand. It was the faintest wandering of his gaze that gave the warning of peril. The dark eyes had glanced beyond me to smile a sudden triumph, and as I wheeled to face this new danger, the two blacks I had thought securely bound to the pillars in the corridor, sprang savagely upon me.

The Pharaoh and his Arab chief were quick in coming to their aid. In an instant I was disarmed, and though I struggled with the fury of despair, it was soon over. Quickly I was dragged down by the weight of their numbers. Then they bound me, my hands behind my back and my feet trussed up to meet them.

The eyes of Karamour were cold and merciless.

"Too long has justice been delayed," he gasped, struggling for breath. "The wisdom of the gods has been blinded by our clemency. We wait no longer. Though none be here to witness the torture, the maws of the Sekhmet will not be denied. There is but one sentence for the unbeliever. The pit!" he ordered.

A shout of unholy joy arose from the Arab as the sentence was pronounced, and drawing back his booted foot, he kicked me heavily in the side.

Quickly I was lifted from the floor, and half pushed, half dragged to the throneroom of the Pharaoh. Once again the chain was run through the iron ring in the center of the floor, and straining desperately on the stout links, the two blacks at last succeeded in raising the heavy covering.

Out from the depths rose the foul odor and horrible squealing, that terrible din I could never forget. The hungry rodents of the pit had heard the removal of the great lid, and knew what to expect. This, then, was the end. I had struggled and fought through a dozen dangers only to share the awful fate of Barakoff. A wave of madness swept over me. Was this dark fiend always to be victorious? Ah, if only my hands were free! It would have been but the work of a moment to spring to my feet and hurl the Pharaoh to his own horrible pit. Once that good deed had been accomplished, my own fate did not matter.

There was no hope. In books, in plays, perhaps, would have come that last-moment rescue so dear to the watching audience, but this was life. Here was grim reality in all its horror, and the law of averages plays few favorites.

The two guards dragged me roughly to my feet. Struggling, straining, I was brought to the edge of the cavernous depths. The squealing rose to a deafening roar. Plainly I could see the leaping brown bodies, the sharp teeth and shining eyes of the great rats, sitting upright, eager, expectant!

The bewhiskered Arab stepped forth, his face lit with a bestial joy as he waved the two blacks from me. It was apparent that his would be the arms that sent me to my death. His hot breath was on my cheek as two strong hands seized me from behind. He had only to give a quick push to topple me to the horrors below. I shut my eyes and hoped the fall to the rocky bottom would kill me.

"A joyous journey, oh unbeliever!" purred the voice in my ear, as his strong body tensed for that fatal shove.

And then, above the squeals and snarlings of the pit came the sharp report of a pistol—a sudden, terrifying bang that caused the Arab chieftain to shrink, clutch wildly at the red blotch on his chest, and then crumple slowly to the dark pit below.

STANDING in the doorway, wide-eyed and glorious, a slender wisp of smoke rising from her heavy pistol, stood the fearless daughter of Hatshepsut. Never had I seen the lovely face so flushed, so breathtakingly beautiful, as at that instant.

"Release the prisoner!" Her silvery voice seemed a million miles away; yet the unwavering automatic told of preparedness. "Untie the thongs that hold him, else you join the Arab. Haste!"

Never in all the world was a command obeyed so promptly as that one. In an instant the cords had dropped from my arms, while willing hands clutched at the bands that held my legs.

Karamour was staring at the Egyptian as though unable to believe his eyes.

"Daughter of the Nile!" he thundered. "Have the black gods of Kemi fled with your reason?"

Behind the ancient throne a small flight of stairs led down to a tiny cell, used as a temporary jail for those awaiting the judgment of the Pharaoh. Into this abode the two blacks were herded, and the stout door closed and fastened.

Karamour's dark gaze had followed our every move.

"What means this madness?" The anger of his black eyes was reflected in the rage that shook his trembling body.

"What is this treachery that the royal Atma flaunts so openly?"

"A forewarning of your doom, Son of Thothmes," answered the girl, stepping slowly backward. "Merely a grim reminder of the nearness of death, and the quickness of Anubis in snatching his victims." Then without taking her eyes off the Pharaoh: "If you are not the greatest of fools," she addressed me, "you will take this last chance and flee while time yet remains. His raiders return at dawn, and our one hope is a swift ride northward. In the courtyard below, two saddled horses are waiting. Answer! Do you go with Atma, or remain as a subject to Karamour's pleasure?"

Up from the depths behind the throne came the thudding of the two imprisoned blacks as they sought to force the heavy door and protect their ruler.

"You had my answer long ago," I told her bitterly. "The black jailer gave my reply to your message."

The girl turned swiftly, her eyes two flaming fires of hate. "You spurn Atma!" she panted. "You would dare to refuse the Princess of Egypt!"

Whatever answer I may have given was lost in the roar of the Pharaoh.

"Stop!" he shouted, and the voice was hardly human. "Stop, mad daughter of Bastel, and explain these words of blasphemy!"

Atma gave a shudder at my refusal, then turned to the wild-eyed monarch.

"I am leaving," she spoke with deadly calmness. "I am leaving for ever these blackened halls of antiquity. The American fool may stay if he chooses, but I go to learn the pleasures of the lands that are new."

"You would leave the fortress of Karamour?" he repeated. His tone was halting, his pallor ghastly. "You—you would forsake the throne of Kemi for that young world of the pale people?"

The girl was backing steadily toward the door, her dark eyes flashing hate and defiance.

"Do not follow," she warned. "Take but one step in pursuit, and your spirit will join the falcon-headed Horus in his halls of eternal mist. My fingers can send quick death crashing to your dark brain. Stay in your corridors of time, oh Son of Thothmes. The Princess of Egypt rides to the north, taking with her the priceless gems of Sheba's desecrated tomb!"

At the mention of that great profanation, the last of the Pharaohs gave a wail of horror and despair.

"Daughter of Hatshepsut," he shrieked, "by all the furies of Hell I curse you!"

With the speed of a striking serpent, his strong hand flew to the knife at his belt. There was a quick sweeping motion, a sharp hissing sound, and a jewel-handled dagger flew across the intervening space to bury itself in Atma's supple body.

The Princess of Egypt gave an agonized start, a swift, half-sobbing cry; and then, without a moan, the glamorous daughter of the ages sank limply to the floor.

She did not sink alone, however. Twice during that brief fall her ivory fingers tightened. Twice the heavy Mauser spurted forth its leaden message of death; and with a startled groan that rose to a frenzied shiek of terror, the last of the Pharaohs clutched madly at the air before him, to drop lifeless to the rocky depths of his own gruesome pit.

And so I come to the end of my story. At last the long night has passed, and now with its sunlight and beauty flames the African dawn. Already the first streaks of gray are whitening the eastern sky. The distant stars wane in the fast-growing light. Through the open

window comes the early chirping of the birds and sweep of the sea wind. The delicate odor of dew-drenched flowers is wafted from the garden. Within the ancient fortress is the awful stillness of the tomb.

Will my story ever reach the outside world? It seems hardly possible, more so as the moment approaches when I must fling it to the waves. Perhaps that great horror which once threatened mankind will never be known. The world may go on, unaware, as years upon years may pass while the sturdy bottle that holds the manuscript drifts on an endless waste of blue, or lies unnoticed on some lonely shore, that a Pharaoh of old Egypt and a crazed Russian scientist had perfected that horrible blue vapor which might have meant universal destruction.

But a few moments lie between me and the unknown. The gun that brought death to the last of the Pharaohs roars again to bring peace and oblivion to me. At dawn the raiders return from the desert, but for all their planning they are doomed to disappointment. Already I have fired the castle, and the flames are rising.

And so it is best that I now bring to an end my long narative, that I fold it in this stout container and cast the heavy bottle to the distant sea below. There I leave it to the waves, to a merciful fate that has long since forgotten me.

I must hasten. The smell of burning wood, the crackling fury of the fire comes ever nearer. The castle of Karamour flames to its destruction. From the tiny cell beyond the throne I hear the shouts and pounding of the blacks, but they are doomed to meet this Hades with me. It is far better that those who knew the secrets and horror of the castle of gloom remain to perish in its blackened ruins.

And so, as the dark clouds swirl forward, and the approaching fires tell the nearness of death, I affix my name to this heavy parchment and say to you, farewell. . . .

[Here the manuscript becomes blurred, almost indecipherable. It is evident that the writer was in the throes of some great emotion.—EDITOR.]

She is alive! She is alive! Atma—Atma is alive! My story was completed and I had paused to add my name, when a slight rustle sounded at the near-by table, and the fearless beauty was before me.

No, she did not die—that glittering sinner of the Nile has not died. Even as I write she stands before me, her firm hand holding the ever-ready Luger while she laughs both long and wildly at my visible surprize; ah, but always do those dark eyes flash the cruelty of the killer. A crimson blotch shows where the thrown knife of Karamour entered that shapely body, the gripping fingers tell the pain and torture that is hers; yet ever will the eternal Atma go on and on through the ages.

Out into the world will she go, to bring ruin and madness to the lives of all men; to charm with the beauty, with the lures and wiles of old Egypt, the hearts and the minds of our youths of tomorrow. Always will she be the irresistible daughter of eternity, who leaves nought but a trail of death and disaster. She is passion! She is glamor! She is—evil!

The manuscript—she says she will throw it to the waves, but I—I must die! I have dared to refuse her, have spurned the blood of the Oekheperkere, and must pay for that awful blasphemy with my life.

The Princess of Egypt is walking slowly toward me. We are alone—alone in a desolate world of black smoke and ruin. The burning—crackling! Great flames are near us, roaring with the fury

of a million hells! Falling chandeliers, the agonized shrieking of the blacks—but the eyes of Atma have not left mine. They sparkle, they flash as horrible black pools.

The heat! Blazing—crashing of lofty towers!

Now she stands before me, and beyond the blackened clouds of smoke comes an ever-increasing stamping—a bestial treading. The gun—the black gun is slowly being raised as a weird cat-like purr springs from those blood-red lips.

The walls are falling!

She is going to shoot! Yes, she is going to kill me! The long fingers are tightening—I am doomed! There is no—that awful treading is nearer!

What—what's that strange form coming out from the flames?

Oh! Oh God, I see . . .

[Here the manuscript ends abruptly.]

THE END

Sea-Wind

By MINNA IRVING

The sea-wind is a pirate bold
  Whose ghost will not be laid,
But scourges still the sandy shores
  That once he used to raid.
He left his bones in gibbet-chains
  To haunt the dark sea-caves,
And beaches bare, and stony cliffs,
  Far isles and stormy waves.

His cutlas whistles to and fro,
  His voice is in the gales;
Of scuttled barks and drowning men
  He tells unholy tales.
He cannot rest without a ship;
  So his uneasy ghost
Goes seeking for his vanished crew
  From lonely coast to coast.

The Will of the Dead

By LORETTA BURROUGH

The story of a hate that was strong enough to strike back from the grave—an unusual weird tale of a mother's malign resentment of her son's wife

EVELYN HAY LANE knew, at the moment she met Alexandra Lane, Stephen's mother, that she had found a mortal enemy. Not that she hadn't been prepared; Steve's half-hints, veiled suggestions, air of nervous expectancy, had let her know that this first meeting was fraught with difficulty.

"Look here, Stephen——" she said. They were driving rapidly over a quiet, moon-patterned road; at the end of the road loomed this meeting and dinner with Alexandra in her vast rich house that perched above the Hudson like an eagle's nest on a mountain top. The mausoleum, Stephen had called it once.

"Yes, what, sweet?" he said, juggling the car expertly past a lumbering truck.

"Am I to understand you haven't told her *yet?* And I want to know, is she Medusa or something? Am I going to be turned into stone when she looks at me?"

"I wouldn't be surprized." Stephen moved his hands on the wheel in a sudden impatient gesture. "Lord, Eve, you've never been up against her! It's like battling a boa constrictor—you just get wrapped around and smothered. And I've been her whole life since Father died, and that was twenty years ago."

"But you haven't told her?"

They had been married five months; they had filled an apartment with new furniture like any newly-weds—they had been man and wife for three week-ends, but Stephen had not yet left his mother.

"This is *terribly* funny!" Evelyn began to laugh, a curious shaking expression of something that was not real mirth.

"No, I haven't told her, and I know we can't go on like this. It's not really being married, and together. But she's got rid of every other girl I ever was interested in—somehow, by hook or by crook." He put his hand on hers, coiling strong warm fingers up to her wrist. "I was afraid that might happen to you. Do you think I'm scared of being disinherited or something?"

No, she had not thought that, well aware there was no weakness, no flaw, anywhere in Stephen except in this queer relation to his mother.

"I know better," she said. "But what *is* it?"

He fumbled at his cigarette case with one hand, got a cigarette out and lighted it elaborately with the lighter on the instrument panel, as though he were postponing the moment for explanation. Then he sighed and said suddenly, "Don't ask me, Eve, because I can't answer—I don't know. She has a queer kind of power over me, as over everyone. I don't understand it. Perhaps you'll see tonight. At any rate"—he snapped the case shut with a sharp, definite sound—"I'm going to tell her this evening, even if The Gables fall in ruins about my ears! And here we are!"

THE car swung in between two stone posts, topped by grinning stone faces, ground up a drive banded with moonlight, and stopped beneath the porte-cochère. The architecture of the house was ugly, with pointing roofs and gables, and gargoyles that looked as though they were about to pounce, projecting into the moonlight from the roof gutters.

"What is it, Gothic?" Evelyn asked, looking up at its face crossed with soft silver light, dark shadows—the stones seemed, to her mind, strung at the moment to imaginativeness, to have a cold malice about them.

"It's a mess. We can leave the car here—there'll be nobody else tonight. Come on!" He caught her by the elbow; she could feel his excitement in the sharpness of his clutch. "I'll leave either with my shield or on it!"

Johnson, the butler, admitted them, a withered black-looking creature, stooped and elderly. Evelyn had a quick impression of a vast dark hallway, and stairs that spiraled up into a height of darkness, before the butler left them in a

"He closed the door softly."

drawing-room. There was a boar's head on the wall above the fireplace, cruel hanging tusks glinting in the dull glow from the chandelier. Cabinets of curios stood about, containing little ivory toys, strings of beads, small unpleasant gods.

"Mother traveled a lot in the East," Stephen said in explanation. "She loves that sort of thing, power of mind over matter, Karma, what not." His handsome, simple face looked at his complicated surroundings with an expression bordering on awe. "It's a wonder I didn't turn into a curio, long ago."

"You would have, if I hadn't rescued you." Evelyn went up to him and they stood together in a close embrace, broken by a voice from the doorway, saying,

"Stephen!"

Evelyn turned, and for a moment, startled by some trick of the light, seemed to be looking into the blinding heart of fire. And then the woman who stood in the doorway moved her hand, and the explosion of color that had come from a ring on her finger ended at once.

"Mother!" Stephen tugged Evelyn awkwardly by the elbow. "I want you to know my friend, Evelyn Hay. Evelyn, this is my mother."

Evelyn understood Stephen's baffling remarks about his mother now. One glance into the dark wells of the woman's eyes made her feel simple and confused and childish—they were so experienced, so subtle in their swift stabbing glances; Evelyn knew she had been weighed and found wanting in a split second.

"I always prefer to know Stephen's friends," his mother said. "Then often they can be my friends. Shall we dine now? Stephen, you were very prompt."

There had been nothing of an obvious sharp offense, and yet Evelyn knew that in some irreparable way she had been deftly injured. When Stephen's mother had looked at her, she had felt as though a sword had been inserted in her heart. Oppressed, she followed that tall thin figure into the dining-room, some secret place in her harboring an uneasy foreboding. Was this what Stephen had encountered whenever he had dared to cross his mother? An impact, too subtle, too intensely painful, to be endured?

It was a strange dinner because of the shadowy things, the unexpressed meanings, that walked cat-footed about them; Evelyn and Stephen spoke hardly at all, but his mother had many words—she talked well, of far places where strange gods were worshipped, of wildernesses where there were no gods but silence; and of Stephen, speaking as though she had made him with her long narrow hands, suggesting that there never had been, and never could be, any life for him apart from her. When she spoke of him her eyes would travel back to Evelyn, piercing in their dark intensity, fixed like an animal's eyes.

Evelyn could see the perspiration that stood in small globes on Stephen's forehead. His head a little to one side, he seemed to listen with an almost mesmerized intentness to the monotone of his mother's voice; it went on and on like a river, punctuated by the light musical jangling of prisms that hung from the chandelier and tinkled in the light breath of wind from a door open at the room's far end.

Every so often, the candelight would strike deep into the ring on Mrs. Lane's finger, calling forth a burst of fire to spring and dance upon the white damask. I am being hypnotized, Evelyn thought suddenly, because she had felt her senses swim for a moment in a dizzy circle within her, and Stephen's pale face, opposite her, had grown dim.

Mrs. Lane's voice went smoothly on,

"I don't believe in marriage for a man like Stephen; do you, Miss Hay?"

Directly addressed, Evelyn was silent. Her eyes were held by Mrs. Lane's; it seemed, for an instant, impossible to do anything but agree. And then something in the coldness and determined cruelty of the gaze that held hers, wakened her sleeping will. She looked away from the woman's eyes, the burning ring upon that white hand. Stephen was staring at her, his face tense—his lips closed in a tight line as though he found himself unable to speak. *Quick!* she heard a sharp voice within her say, and her lips formed and spoke the words,

"That's nonsense! I believe in marriage for anyone who needs it. Stephen did, and I love him. That's why I married him. We were married five months ago—we have a little apartment in the city. We're going there tonight."

The realization came clearly to her that if she had not said that, Stephen would not have gone back with her—he would have stayed with his mother, and she would never have had him again. But the words had broken whatever it was that knotted him to his mother.

He leaped up from his chair, almost overturning it in the violence of his release, and swung a white defiant face toward Mrs. Lane.

"Yes, we're married," he said. "And you can't stop it. Not with Karma, or mesmerism, or whatever you do! Not with anything!"

His mother had moved once, when Evelyn had spoken, moved as though something had struck her from within, but now she sat still, turning the ring upon her finger; red-blue-green flashed from it—one moment a pale milky globe, it shifted into a core of flame, and back again. The prisms tinkled in the breeze, dropping a chilly shower of sound. Evelyn could hear her own shallow breathing, forced by the faster pumping of her heart. Stephen and I are like two mice, she thought, terrified by a cat.

And then she felt his arm about her shoulder and her thoughts steadied—she must not think of his mother as strange or malignant, because that must be fanciful and untrue.

"Please let us be friends, Mrs. Lane," she said.

The woman's eyes made her think of something that has been wounded, and is dying of the wound; yet even as she looked, they changed, and Evelyn quailed before the intensity of hate that seemed to radiate from the silent figure seated at the end of the long table. Her first impression was true, she understood at once; there was great danger here.

"Mother," Stephen said hastily, as though he felt this too, "I'll leave our address. You can reach us at it, any time."

His quick fingers dropped a card upon the white damask.

"Please, Mother——" His voice pleaded.

But there was no answer except the soft dreamy tinkling of the moving prisms, the flashes of fire from the turning ring, if answer that could be called.

"Come on, let's get out." Stephen tugged at Evelyn's elbow and they left the room.

EVELYN drew a deep breath of the cold spring air, when they were outdoors in the moonlight. Everything seemed pressed into rigidity, as though dipped in metal; even the trees seemed momentarily as frozen as the stone gargoyles.

"That was awful, Stephen!" she said. "Your mother hates me."

"Yes," he admitted. "And me too, now that I've gone against her, I suppose."

They got into the car; he put it in gear

and they shot off down the drive. Evelyn looked back once at the towering dark thrust of the house, with moonlight like snow upon its roofs.

"There is something about her——" Evelyn spoke in a hushed and worried voice. Absurd to think that his mother's influence might reach out through stone walls and hurt them, yet there it was!

"Something," he agreed. "Something —nasty. You know what I saw her doing once, when I was a child?"

He took out a cigarette and lighted it with a hand whose tremor betrayed shaking nerves.

"I don't know how I happened to see—yes I do, too. I went up to her room for something—I know I thought she was out in the garden. I opened the door, and she was sitting there at a little table. That ring of hers was in front of her on a black velvet pad, and she was staring at the ring—into it, I might almost say, as though it had depths. Her face was terrible, dark. I closed the door softly—though I don't suppose she would have heard me, she was so absorbed in what she was doing—and went away in a hurry; somehow I knew she wouldn't have liked it if she'd known I'd seen her. But I've never forgotten, it was so queer."

He blew out a streamer of smoke.

"It was like—well, black magic. As though she were putting a spell on someone."

Evelyn looked up at him. His face was set in an unhappy frown.

"Don't be so worried, Stephen," she said soothingly. "She can't hurt us." At least, they were brave words. "That odd ring of hers, it is so beautiful—what is it?"

"A girasol. Fire-opal. I suppose it's very valuable. And probably it has some bloody and horrible history, like most of the things she owns."

"You're out of that house for ever, darling. And she *can't* hurt us."

"I'd like to think she can't." And then he smiled, and took her hand. "Do you realize we're going to our home, Mrs. Stephen Lane?"

THE telephone was ringing with a cold and empty sound when they entered the apartment.

"Who on earth?" Evelyn said, as Stephen shucked off his coat and went to answer it. "Nobody knows we're here."

"Nobody but Mother." He lifted the receiver with an unwilling air and said, "Hello?"

And then Evelyn saw his body stiffen into a sudden motionless rigidity. "Oh, God!" he said. "Get a doctor, Johnson. I'll leave right away—I should be there in forty-five minutes."

He dropped the receiver and turned to her, his face gray. She went to him without a word, taking his hands.

"Mother's hung herself," he said. "Johnson is sure that she's dead."

MRS. LANE was buried on Saturday. On Monday evening, Stephen came home, and Evelyn met him at the door.

"Well?" she said.

"The servants are gone, the house is shut up, the keys are left with the real estate agent. We're through, Evelyn!"

They clung to each other for a moment.

"Stephen, it's been terrible for you! You look worn out."

His face, in these few days, had sunken in; there were dark smudged circles beneath his eyes. Even his voice had a hoarse, worn undertone in it.

"I couldn't sleep well up there; the house seemed—I know it sounds queer to say it—unfriendly." He took off his coat slowly and hung it in the foyer closet. "As though her possessions hated me."

"You only imagined it." She gave him a gentle push toward the living-room. "Sit down with the paper—dinner will be ready in a moment."

Although he settled himself obediently in an easy-chair with the newspaper spread before him like wings, she could see, glancing in at him from time to time, that he was not reading and that his thoughts were unpleasant.

"Something's troubling you, Stephen," she said, when they were having coffee. He looked a little better, but only a little.

"Yes," he admitted, "perhaps I should tell you about it. Something in the will." He had called her Friday evening, to tell her that the will had been read, and everything had been left to him. "And perhaps I shouldn't." He prodded in a package of cigarettes, took one out and lighted it. "Mother had added a codicil, duly witnessed and all that. She must have done it just before——"

"Yes," Evelyn said, apprehensive of the dark cloud that had hung over him for a moment then.

"In it, she expressed the wish that her most cherished possession, her girasol ring, be given to her daughter-in-law, Evelyn Hay Lane."

"I won't have it, Stephen," Evelyn said quickly. "I won't wear it—I don't even want it in the house."

"Don't worry." The smoke from his cigarette coiled between his fingers in spirals of soft velvet blue. "Probably I should have consulted you—but I was pretty sure what you'd say. I had it buried with her. I saw them close the coffin, and it was on her finger, winking and blinking." He blew out a deep breath of disgust. "I can't figure out what her idea was, in leaving it to you. At any rate, I'm sure that this is the first time Mother did not get her way."

It was strange to think of the ring, smothered in grave darkness—it could not shine and spit fire out of its milkiness, where it was now.

"I'm glad," Evelyn said. "It may seem terrible to say this, Stephen, and foolishly superstitious, but I think it would have poisoned me. I know I wouldn't have been happy, with it anywhere near."

He sat frowning at his demi-tasse, turning it between his fingers. "I was just remembering how anyone who ever displeased Mother had something very miserable and unhappy occur to them. If they didn't die, I guess they wished they had." He reached out his hand for the glass jar of coffee. "There was a neighbor of ours who got in her bad graces—his son died, his wife ran away, his house burned down—and he left, not exactly the man he came."

Evelyn felt as though a shadow had stretched over her suddenly.

"Don't be an idiot, Stephen," she said. "*I'm* not going to curl up and wither away."

He touched her hand.

"Of course not," he said, "now that she's gone. Only I'm glad her ring's gone with her."

Evelyn thought how weird their talk was, in this apartment in Manhattan's heart; beyond their windows pulsated the life of a great city, lighted a few blocks away by the hearty coarse glitter of Broadway.

"But now, Stephen, I've got some *good* news. I went to the doctor today. I'm going to have a baby."

For a moment, he only stared, and then his eyes gleamed.

"Lord!" he said, leaning over to kiss her. "That's wonderful! I'll open a bottle of wine—we'll celebrate!"

And then, sharp, trailing, insidious shadows, a thought started up in her brain—His mother hated me so. But she's dead, of course. So she couldn't hurt the baby in any way. *But could she?*

It took her only a moment to dismiss it. But the suggestion had been there, and in the following months it came back often to plague her until she spoke of it to Stephen more than once. Absurd, ridiculous, superstitious, but there, like a knife turning slowly in her mind.

"SEE, little idiot!" he said tenderly, leaning above her, "how foolish your superstitious fancies were!"

The baby had been born in the morning. Evelyn had just awakened from a deep sleep, and she lay there untroubled, glad it was all over.

"He's a grand baby, isn't he?" she said.

"The doctor told me he was one of the healthiest he had ever seen."

Her eyes wandered toward the lace-covered bassinet; she could see nothing of the baby but one small fist, curled in a ball. "We'll call him Stephen. No doubt he'll grow up to be President."

"No doubt," the nurse agreed, smiling, coming up to the bed at that moment. "But you'll have to leave, Mr. Lane. Your wife's got to be settled for the night."

Stephen went out. She relaxed in the nurse's ministering hands, thinking of the baby. He would look like Stephen, of course; he would be like Stephen, he would be a swell fellow.

And then the nurse turned suddenly and stared at the bassinet.

"Quick!" Evelyn cried, struggling to sit up, for there had come one sharp and pointed cry in the air of the still room.

Stephen had heard it too.

"Make her lie down and keep still!" the nurse commanded him, running to the bassinet, lifting the baby out, taking him from the room.

"Stephen, Stephen——" Evelyn whimpered.

SHE slept that night because they had given her drugs, and she slept the next day and the next night, for the same reason. But they let her wake the following morning, and her first words were, "Why? Why? Why did it happen, Stephen? They said the baby was so healthy. *Why?*"

The doctor stood there, with Stephen. "I'd tell her," he said. "I think it would be better," and went out.

It must be something very dreadful, she knew, looking at Stephen, because he has grown older in more than time since the morning the baby had been born. His hands kept moving in small trembling motions as though they would never stop and be strong steady hands again. And his eyes, what had happened to his eyes? They looked as though they would never see the world in quite the same way again.

"The doctor's a fool!" he said. "I shouldn't tell you."

She caught his fingers. "You must—I'm going crazy, wondering—the nurse looks at me with such pity, but she won't tell me anything. Nobody will."

He wrapped his hand about hers; in it she could feel a steadily recurrent tremor.

"There had to be an autopsy," he said in a dull voice, "because they couldn't find any cause of death. You know they do that—I didn't want them to, but it's the law. As though we might have poisoned him or something!" He went on, picking his words slowly. "Perhaps I was afraid to know, too."

"Please——"

In a moment he began again, speaking more quickly. "They couldn't find anything wrong, there was nothing at all, he was a perfectly normal infant, until they opened his heart."

His voice seemed to fail him; his hand spread across his eyes.

"Poor Stephen!" she whispered. She

must be strong because he was so shattered; she would be strong.

"Then——" He stopped, his eyes clouded, as though for a moment he could not think of words, or what they meant.

"Then," he repeated, "they couldn't understand how it could beat at all for hours, as it did." His hand tightened about hers. "Are you strong enough? Do you know—perhaps you can guess, what was wrong?"

Her eyes asked him, terrified. What dreadful thing *could* there be wrong with an infant's tiny heart? "Please, Stephen——"

"This," he said brokenly, "in his heart's right ventricle."

He opened his other hand and showed her what lay on his palm.

She knew then that she would never again be strong enough for anything life might bring her. She felt a scream welling deep within her, but not yet, for a moment, sound.

The sunlight that had been stealing up the counterpane reached and touched what was in his hand. A burst of fire sprang forth, for an instant colored green-blue, and then steadying into a perfect flame, the hue of blood. Magnificent, glorious, the girasol ring winked and glowed.

The Soul-Eater

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

I swam below the surface of a lake
  And found myself within a curious hall,
  Lined with bronze columns, somber-black and tall;
On them I heard the evil gray waves break.
Sudden the granite floor began to shake;
  A monster strode from out an iron stall;
  Before his gryphon feet I reeled, to fall
As one who, dreaming, struggles to awake.

Upon my lips he set his grisly mouth
As to allay some fierce, demoniac drouth.
  A broken shell, I tread the earth in vain;
My comrades are the goblin and the troll,
  Since One in that forgotten, sunken fane
In evil hunger sucked from me my soul.

Gica Lacilu, the Magician*

By ERNST WURM

Retribution overtook the tyrant Romanian boyard, who oppressed the serfs intolerably

THAT is what his neighbors still call him. But Gica Lacilu, a big, plump old citizen of seventy, who lives comfortably with his placid old wife under the fragrant acacias in the outskirts of the little village of Jalomitza, in southern Romania, does not look like a man with a mysterious past. Still, when I asked him about the tales which the admiring villagers told me of his youth, he was flattered and confirmed them, adding details which made nearly complete the incident which earned him his title of Magician. Nearly complete, I say; for he was notably reticent about one part of it, and left the story, so to speak, without its key. A mystery story without its clue is always exasperating; but I will set down all I know of the case, and the reader's imagination may be able to give it a certain completeness.

Even as late as when Romania won her independence of Turkey, a date still within the memory of Gica Lacilu and of some of the rest of us, the country was barbarous and lawless to a degree that western Europe and America can scarcely conceive. Men were born, lived precariously and died without benefit of clergy, physicians or police. The population was three-fourths illiterate, and superstitions were rife. The brutal feudal landlord Gioranii de Joos tyrannized over the Jaromitza peasants with a mad violence that would have been impossible if the country had had any real organization, or the population any real information as to their rights and the strength of their united arms.

Gioranii de Joos had had a wife, but she had died of terror and heart-break years before. He had never had any children except illegitimate children of whose existence he was as ignorant and as careless as a drunken auto-driver might be of the dogs and chickens he leaves maimed and helpless in his wake. He had a way of riding through one of his villages and scanning with his sharp black eyes the face of every woman he passed. If his glance fell on a particularly appetizing young matron or a fresh and graceful maiden, he would pull up his horse, call the terrified woman to his side, and order her to bring to his castle, at such and such a time, some contribution in kind, eggs or vegetables or the wonderful, juicy melons for which the region is famous. This, short of death, was the most horrible disaster that could befall a countrywoman of the Wallachian hill country, but the universal fear of Gioranii was so cringingly abject that the order had never been disobeyed.

ONE day Gioranii de Joos rode rapidly around the hill along whose base straggled the long street of Jalomitza, and came without warning on a young girl who, when she saw him, turned red and then pale and tried to look in the other direction and seem oblivious of his presence. The rider with the ugly eagle-

* Adapted by Roy Temple House from the German.

beak and the hard lips stopped and stared at the girl. But she quickened her pace and ran into one of the huts at the end of the street.

Gioranii's brow clouded with annoyance at the hint of disobedience. He turned and noticed an old peasant standing near, trembling with apprehension, but careful, since he was caught in the trap, to save his own skin by truckling to the tyrant. The Boyard called to the old peasant:

"Did you see a girl go into that house?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"Who is she?"

"She is Marivara Guip, daughter of Xerxe Guip."

"Call her out at once!"

The old man ran to the house as fast as his cowardly old legs would carry him, and disappeared inside. The Boyard waited. After a delay of several minutes, two peasants came out of the house, but no woman.

Gioranii choked with indignation. "I didn't send you to bring out a man!"

"This is Xerxe Guip."

"What do you want of me, Xerxe Guip?"

"My daughter cannot come out."

"She just ran in, on good legs. Has she forgotten how to walk?"

"She cannot come out, because Gica Lacilu has forbidden her to."

"And who is Gica Lacilu?"

"He is my daughter's bridegroom."

The Boyard ceased raging and smiled, a cold, terrible smile. He dismounted from his horse, pushed the peasant rudely aside, and strode over the threshold of Xerxe Guip.

A young peasant, a magnificent figure of a man, with a desperate black look on his handsome face, stepped across the Boyard's path. The mad rage welled up in Gioranii again, and he lifted his whip. Then he must have realized, even through his blind fury, that this man was not ready to crumple before him as the other peasants had always done, and that the young giant's fist could strike a hard blow. He paused, and considered the situation.

The hut was only one great room, and over Gica Lacilu's mighty shoulder the Boyard could see Marivara Guip cowering in the far corner. As if the young champion between them did not exist, the tyrant called to the girl:

"Why didn't you come out when I called you?"

"Because she belongs to me and not to you, Boyard!"

The young man had spoken, quietly, unflinchingly. Gioranii could scarcely believe his ears. These words from a peasant, from one of his serfs, his chattels! Gioranii ground his teeth, and he lifted his whip again. But once more he mastered his rage. Still ignoring the audacious peasant, he spoke to the girl in the back of the room, in a tone of icy command:

"Tomorrow, at midday exactly, you will bring to the castle the two finest and ripest cantaloupes in your father's field. At midday exactly, do you hear? And wear a better gown than the one you have on now!"

He turned abruptly, and without another word he strode haughtily back to his horse. His long, crooked legs swung themselves in place again around the belly of his mount, and without deigning to cast a glance at the fearful villagers whose curiosity strove with their apprehension as they slunk out of his path, he scattered clouds of dust over them as he galloped down the village street.

FOR young Gica Lacilu the die was cast. He knew that nothing could make his case any worse with the Boyard than it

already was, and he was determined to defend the honor of his bride with his own life, if necessary. Bellowing as furiously as the half-mad lord of the manor had done, he swore that he would kill the girl if she carried anything to the castle, tomorrow or any other day. But old Xerxe Guip whimpered and protested that the young man was calling down on the heads of all the family persecution, ruin and perhaps death.

Death? Instead of frightening young Gica Lacilu, the word seemed to inspire him and please him. All at once he grew cheerful and compliant, and agreed without further argument that the best solution of the matter would be for Marivara to take the cantaloupes to the Boyard at noon of the next day.

In the forenoon Gica came for the girl and insisted on choosing the cantaloupe for her. Gica was a famous judge of cantaloupes, and he spent a long time examining the finest-looking specimens in the whole field, before he finally brought in two magnificent big melons. But as he was in the act of handing them to the girl, he seemed to be struck suddenly by a new idea.

"Wait a minute," he said, "till I take them to the brook and wash them off, so that they will be perfectly clean and very inviting. You must urge him to eat one of them at once. Tell him they are the juiciest melons we have ever had, and *make* him taste it! You *must* make him taste it at once, girl! If you don't I'll——"

And the young man's face grew so dark and threatening that the girl shuddered, and hastened to assure him that she would obey him to the letter.

Bravely young Marivara made her way to the ogre's den, carrying her two luscious big melons. She was taken at once to Gioranii. The brute paid no attention to her burden, but devoured the beautiful girl with his eyes, and drove the servants furiously out of the room. Marivara evaded his grasp, and held out to him persistently the larger and more perfect of the melons, till the Boyard, who was a great glutton, laughed almost good-naturedly at her flattering interest in his palate, sliced the tempting fruit open with his dagger, and thrust great, fragrant, refreshing fragments of the delicious flesh into his enormous, slobbering mouth.

Then when the joy of eating began to pall, he rushed at the girl. But Marivara escaped him. And when, with her lace collar torn and her long hair falling in disorder over her shoulders, she fled out of the room and ran through the long hall and out into the court, Gioranii was able to follow her only as far as the stables. All at once he was seized with frightful pains and fell to the ground roaring in agony. He writhed and cursed and bawled for help, but he was in a state where no one could help him but God. Three hours later, three hours of hideous suffering, he died. And no one, in the castle or out of it, mourned his death.

"What had happened to him?" I asked the peasants who first told me the story.

"Gica Lacilu had laid a curse on him," was all they would tell me.

"What had happened to him?" I asked old Gica when *he* told it.

"I had laid a curse on him," said Gica, "just as the others told you."

And this was all I was ever able to get out of him. And I might have been more insistent if, in order to profit by my stay in Wallachia, I had not bought and read with a good deal of care a German volume on the history, ancient and modern, of the Vlachs or Wallachs who inhabit that part of Romania. A paragraph from the last chapter of this useful work,

a chapter which treats of the manners and customs of the modern Wallachs, runs as follows:

"As a protection against the fevers which are epidemic in this country during the trying hot summers, the peasants of Wallachia brew a strong and very mysterious drug whose formula seems to have been successfully kept a secret from outsiders. It is said to be a mixture of powerful herbs and the juices of various uncanny reptiles and insects, and there are hints that ceremonies much like the incantations of witches play a part in its preparation. It is so powerful that when taken for medicinal effect, a dose consists of only one tiny drop. In any considerable quantity it is a deadly poison. Many Wallachians appear to make use of it frequently, but with the most careful precautions and with the utmost secrecy. . . ."

I SHOWED the paragraph to a Wallachian acquaintance who knew German. He turned pale and declared vehemently that he had no idea what the ignorant traveler was gabbling about. But it was perfectly clear that I had touched him in a tender spot, and I was very careful not to mention the paragraph to Gica the Magician.

Or to his cheerful old wife, who listened complacently and with something approaching a smirk when her husband told the story of which she was the heroine.

The Jest of Droom-Avista

By HENRY KUTTNER

A brief, poetic story about an alien city and a metallic doom

THERE is a tale they tell of voices that called eerily by night in the marble streets of long-fallen Bel Yarnak, saying: "Evil is come to the land; doom falls on the fair city where our children's children walk. Wo, wo unto Bel Yarnak." Then did the dwellers in the city gather affrightedly in huddled groups, casting furtive glances at the Black Minaret that spears up gigantically from the temple gardens; for, as all men know, when doom comes to Bel Yarnak, the Black Minaret will play its part in that dreadful Ragnarok.

Wo, wo unto Bel Yarnak! Fallen for ever are the shining silver towers, lost the magic, soiled the glamor. For stealthily and by night, under the triple moons that hurtle swiftly across the velvet sky, doom crept out inexorably from the Black Minaret.

Mighty magicians were the priests of the Black Minaret. Mighty were they, alchemists and sorcerers, and always they

sought the Stone of the Philosophers, that strange power which would enable them to transmute all things into the rarest of metals. And in a vault far below the temple gardens, toiling endlessly at glittering alembics and shining crucibles, lit by the violet glow of *ocuru*-lamps, stood Thorazor, mightiest of priests, wisest of all who dwelt in Bel Yarnak. Days and weeks and years he had toiled, while strange moons reeled down to the horizons, seeking the Elixir. Gold and silver paved the streets; blazing diamonds, moon-glowing opals, purple gems of strange fire, meteor-fallen, made of Bel Yarnak a splendid vision, shining by night to guide the weary traveler across the sandy wastes. But a rarer element Thorazor sought. Other worlds possessed it, for the intricate telescopes of the astronomers revealed its presence in the flaming suns that fill the chaotic sky, making night over Bel Yarnak a mirror reflecting the blazing scintillance of the city, a star-carpeted purple tapestry where the triple moons weave their arabesque patterns. So toiled Thorazor under the Black Minaret all of glistening jet onyx.

He failed, and again he failed, and at length he knew that only with the gods' aid could he find the Elixir he sought. Not the little gods, nor the gods of good and evil, but Droom-avista, the Dweller Beyond, the Dark Shining One, Thorazor called up blasphemously from the abyss. For Thorazor's brain was warped; he had toiled endlessly, and failed as often; in his mind was but one thought. So he did that which is forbidden: he traced the Seven Circles and spoke the Name which wakens Droom-avista from his brooding sleep.

A shadow swept down, darkening over the Black Minaret. Yet Bel Yarnak was untroubled; glorious and beautiful the shining city glowed while thin voices called weirdly in the streets.

Wo, wo unto Bel Yarnak! For the shadow darkened and encompassed the Black Minaret, and midnight black closed ominously about the sorcerer Thorazor. All alone he stood in his chamber, no gleam of light relieving the awful darkness that heralded the coming of the Dark Shining One, and slowly, ponderously, there rose up before him a Shape. But Thorazor cried out and hid his eyes, for none may look upon the Dweller Beyond lest his soul be blasted for ever.

Like the groaning tocsin of a Cyclopean bell came the voice of the Dweller, rumbling terribly under the Black Minaret. Yet only Thorazor heard it, for he alone had called up Droom-avista.

"Now my sleep is troubled," the god cried. "Now my dreams are shattered and I must weave new visions. Many worlds, a mightier cosmos, have you ruined; yet there are other worlds and other dreams, and perchance I shall find amusement in this little planet. For is not one of my names the Jester?"

Shuddering and fearful, still hiding his eyes, Thorazor spoke.

"Great Droom-avista, I know your name; I have said it. By the doom even upon you, you must obey one command of him who calls you up."

The darkness throbbed and pulsed. Ironically Droom-avista assented. "Command, then. O little fool, command your god! For always have men sought to enslave gods, and ever have they succeeded too well."

Yet Thorazor heeded not the warning. One thought only had he: the Elixir, the mighty magic that would transmute all things into the rarest of elements, and to Droom-avista he spoke fearlessly. He said his desire.

"But is that all?" the god said slowly. "Now this is but a small thing for which to disturb my slumber. So shall I grant

your desire—for am I not named the Jester? Do thus and thus." And Droom-avista spoke of that which would transmute all things into the rarest of metals on Bel Yarnak.

Then the god withdrew, and the shadow lifted. Again Droom-avista sank into his dreaming sleep, weaving intricate cosmogonies; and speedily he forgot Thorazor. But the sorcerer stood in his chamber, trembling with exultation, for at his feet lay a jewel. This had the god left behind.

FLAMING, blazing, streaming with weird fire the gem illuminated the dark chamber, driving the shadows back into the distant corners. Yet Thorazor had no eyes for its beauty; this was the Philosopher's Stone, this the Elixir! A glory was in the wizard's eyes as he prepared a brew as Droom-avista had commanded.

Then the mixture seethed and bubbled in the golden crucible, and over it Thorazor held the shining jewel. The culmination of a lifetime's hopes was reached as he dropped the gem into the frothing brew.

For a heartbeat nothing happened. Then, slowly at first, but with increasing swiftness, the golden crucible changed in color, slowly darkening. Thorazor cried out, blessing Droom-avista, for the crucible was no longer golden. It had been transmuted, by the power of the jewel, into the rarest of metals.

The gem, as though lighter than the bubbling mixture, lay lightly on the liquid surface. But the metamorphosis was not yet complete. The darkness crept down the pedestal that supported the crucible; it spread out like a fungoid stain across the onyx floor. It reached the feet of Thorazor, and the sorcerer stood frozen, glaring down at the frightful transmutation that was changing his body from flesh and blood into solid metal. And in a flash of blinding realization Thorazor knew Droom-avista's jest, and knew that by the power of the Elixir all things are changed to the rarest of elements.

He shrieked once, and then his throat was no longer flesh. And slowly, slowly, the stain spread across the floor and up the stone walls of the chamber. The shining onyx dulled and lost its sheen. And the hungry stain crept out through the Black Minaret, out upon Bel Yarnak, while the thin voices cried sadly in the marble streets.

Wo, wo unto Bel Yarnak! Fallen is the glory, dulled and tarnished the gold and silver splendor, cold and lifeless the beauty of the magic citadel. For outward and ever outward crept the stain, and in its path all was changed. The people of Bel Yarnak no longer move light-heartedly about their houses; lifeless images throng the streets and palaces. Immovable and silent sits the Sindara on a tarnished throne; dark and grim looms the city under the hurtling moons. It is Dis; it is the damned city, and sad voices in the silent metropolis mourn for lost glory.

Fallen is Bel Yarnak! Changed by the magic of Thorazor and by Droom-avista's jest, changed to the rarest of all elements in that planet of gold and silver and shining gems.

No longer Bel Yarnak—it is Dis, the City of Iron!

The Terrible Parchment*

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The author describes this as "a Necronomicon story to end all Necronomicon stories"

"HERE'S your WEIRD TALES," smiled my wife, entering the apartment.

"Thanks, Gwen," I said, rising and taking the magazine she held out. "I say, it's surely not the first of the month."

"Not for two days yet," Gwen assured me. "But, just as I came to the front door, a funny old man bobbed up with an armful of magazines—advance copies, I guess. He stuck a copy of W. T. right under my nose. I gave him a quarter and —oop!"

I had opened the magazine, and a page fluttered to the floor. We both stooped for it, both seized it, and we both let go.

Gwen gasped and I whistled. For that fallen page had such a clammy, wet feel to it. *Dank* is the word, I should think. Still stooping, we frowned mystifiedly at each other. Then I conquered my momentary disgust, took hold of it again, and lifted it into the light of my desk lamp.

"It's not paper," Gwen said at once.

No more it was, and what could it be doing in WEIRD TALES?—though it looked weird enough, in all conscience. It was a rectangle of tawny, limp parchment, grained on the upper side with scales, like the skin of some unfamiliar reptile. I turned it over, revealing a smoother surface with pore-like markings and lines of faint, rusty scribbling.

"Arabic," I pronounced at once. "Let's phone for Kline to come over; he reads the stuff."

"There's one Greek word," Gwen pointed out. Her pink-tipped forefinger touched the string of capital letters at the upper edge:

NEKPONOMIKON

"*Necronomicon,*" she spelled out. "That P would be the letter *rho* in Greek. *Necronomicon*—sounds woogey, what?"

"That's the name of H. P. Lovecraft's book," I told her.

"Lovecraft's book? Oh, yes, I remember. He's always mentioning it in his stories."

"And lots of W. T. authors—Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Bloch and so on—have taken it up," I added.

"But Lovecraft imagined the thing, didn't he?"

I laid the parchment on the desk, for my fingers still rebelled at its strange dankness. "Yes, Lovecraft imagined it. Describes it as the work of a mad Arab wizard, Abdul Alhazred, and it's supposed to contain secrets of powerful evils that existed before the modern world. It's already become legendary."

Again my wife touched the thing, very gingerly. "But what's it for? Some sort of valentine or April Fool joke, stuck in to thrill the subscribers? If so, it's cleverly made—looks a million years old."

We pored over the rusty-looking scrawl of Arabic, our heads close together. It must be a fake, we agreed, yet there was every appearance of age-old fadedness about the ink.

* To the memory of H. P. Lovecraft, with all admiration.

"Kline must come over and have a look at it," I reiterated. "He may give some clue as to where it's from, and what it was doing in WEIRD TALES."

Gwen was studying the last line of characters.

"This part isn't faked," she said suddenly. "Look, the ink is fresh—almost wet. And it's not Arabic, it's Latin." She paused a moment, slowly translating in her mind. "It says, 'Chant out the spell, and give me life again.'" She straightened up. "How about a spot of cribbage?"

We both sighed with genuine relief as we turned our backs on the parchment. Light as had been our talk, we had been somehow daunted by the sense of mystery that had ridden in upon us. I got the board and the cards and we began to play on the dining-table.

Ten minutes later I turned suddenly, as if a noise had come to my mind's ear, and gazed at the desk. The parchment was no longer there.

"Look," cried Gwen. "It's blown off on the floor."

I rose and picked it up. It felt even more unpleasant than before, and this time it seemed to wriggle in my hand. Perhaps a draft stirred it, but I could detect no draft. Dropping it back on the desk, I weighted it with an ash-tray and went back to the game.

Gwen beat me soundly, adding to her household money thereby. I taunted her with suggestions of a girlhood misspent at gaming-tables, then turned idly to the desk once more.

The rectangle of parchment was *beside* the ash-tray, not *under* it, and—that undetectable draft again!—was sliding ever so deliberately toward the edge of the desk. I swore, or so Gwen insists, and fairly jumped over to seize it.

"This is getting ridiculous," Gwen protested, fumbling nervously with the cards on the table.

I was studying the thing again. "I thought you said the last line was in Latin," I remarked.

"Why, so it is."

"No, it's in English." I read it aloud: "'Chant out the spell, and give me life again.' Hello, the next to the last line is in English, too."

It also was written with fresh ink and in a bold hand:

"Many minds and many wishes give substance to the worship of Chthulhu."

GWEN had come to look over my shoulder. "By heaven, dear, you're right. 'Many minds and——' But what does Chthulhu mean? Does it have anything to do with the chthonian gods—the underworld rulers that the ancient Greeks served in fear?"

"I shouldn't be surprized," I replied, and it sounded even drier than I had intended. "Chthulhu is a name that Lovecraft and Smith and the others used in their yarns. He's a god of old time, they tell us, and a rank bad one at that."

She shuddered, but gamely turned the shudder into a toss of her shoulders. "I suppose," she hazarded, "that the 'many minds and wishes' have given substance to this page of the *Necronomicon*."

"Nonsense, the *Necronomicon's* only something in Lovecraft's stories."

"Didn't you just say that it had become a legend among readers of weird fiction?" she reminded, utterly serious. "What's the next step after that?"

"What you're trying to suggest," I said, trying to be gayly scornful, "is that so many people have thought and talked about Lovecraft's book that they've actually given it substance."

"Something like that," she nodded thoughtfully. Then, more brightly: "Oh,

it'll turn out to be a joke or something else anticlimactic."

"Right," I agreed readily. "After all, we're not living in a weird tale, you know."

"If we were, that would explain why there was one last line in Latin before, and now two last lines in English." She warmed to the idea. "You see, it was turning deliberately into a language we could read. When we hesitated over the Latin——"

"——it kindly changed into English," I finished.

Again she nodded. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

"Trite but true. Still, my name's not Horatio, and it's bedtime. Let's not dream any philosophies that will turn into nightmare." Once more I picked up that clammy parchment. "As for this creation of many minds or what have you, I'm putting it under stoppages." Opening the big dictionary that lies on a stand beside my desk, I laid the parchment inside and closed the heavy book upon it. "There it stays until we get Kline here tomorrow. And now to bed."

To bed we went, but not to sleep. Gwen squirmed and muttered, and I was weary in every portion of my body save the eyelids. We got up once for sandwiches and milk, and a second time for aspirin. A third time we lay down, and I, at least, dozed off.

I started awake to the pressure of Gwen's fingers on my shoulder.

"I think——" she began tensely. Then I heard what she had heard, a faint, stealthy rustle.

I reached for the light cord above the bed and gave it a jerk. The room sprang into radiance, and through the open door I could see the parlor. I sat up in bed, staring.

Something hung down from between the leaves of the dictionary by the desk, something that moved even as I made it out. Something that would be rectangular if laid flat, but which was now limper, more flexible than the wettest rag, that seemed to *flow* from its narrow prison like a trickle of fluid filth.

"It's getting away," breathed Gwen almost inaudibly. "It's going to come here for us."

The parchment worked its last corner free and dropped to the floor with a fleshy slap, as though it had soft weight. It began to move across the rug toward the bedroom door. Toward us.

I dare say I might be able to describe painstakingly its appearance as it moved —how it humped up in the middle and laid its corners to the floor like feet. But how can I convey the heart-stopping nastiness of it, how visualize for you the animosity and sense of wicked power that it gave off in waves almost palpable? You might get an idea of how it looked by draping a sheet of brown paper over the back of a creeping turtle . . . no, that sounds ludicrous. There was nothing funny in the way that parchment moved across the carpet toward us, not a single atom of humor.

Gwen had slipped out from under the covers and crouched, all doubled up and panicky, against the headboard. Her helpless terror nerved me to defense. Somehow I got out and stood upright on the floor. I am sure that I looked most unheroic with my rumpled hair and my blue pajamas and my bare feet, but I was ready to do battle.

Yes, do battle with what? And how?

That crawling scrap of parchment had reached the threshold, hunched over the door-sill like a very flat and loathly worm. I could see the writing on it, not rusty and faint but black and heavy. Snatching a water-glass from the bedside table, I

hurled it. The foul thing crumpled suddenly sidewise. The glass splintered to atoms where it had been. Next moment the parchment was humping and creeping faster, almost scampering, toward my bare toes.

"Smash it," Gwen choked out. She must have been ready to faint.

Against a chair close at hand leaned her little parasol, a feminine thing with a silken tassel at its handle and a ferrule of imitation amber. I seized it and made a violent stab at the horrid invader. My point thrust the center of it against the floor, and for a moment I pinned it there.

Then I was able to see in what manner it was changed.

At the top was still the Greek word NEKPONOMIKON in aged ink; but the Arabic writing that had filled the page below was gone, or transformed; transformed into English, written large and bold and black as jet. Stooped as I was above it, I read at a glance the first line.

A thousand times since I have yearned to speak that line aloud, to write it down, to do something that would ease my mind of it. But I must not, now or ever. As it was, the world escaped all too narrowly.

Who shaped so dreadful a thought? Abdul Alhazred is but a figment of Lovecraft's imagination. And Lovecraft is human—he could never have dreamed anything like those words, those words that lie upon my mind, I say, like links of a red-hot iron chain. And they were but the beginning of the writing. What could it have been like in full?

I dare not surmise. But this much I suddenly knew for the truth, as I tried to crush that horribly alive parchment-scrap beneath my inadequate parasol — the formless evil of the centuries had taken form. An author had fancied the book, hundreds of others had given it fuller being by their own mental images. The new-hatched legend had become a slender but fearsome peg on which terror, creeping over the borderland from its own forbidding realm, could hang itself. Once hung there, it could grow tangible, solid, potent.

"Gwen," I warned, "hide your eyes. Don't look. Don't read."

"What do you mean, don't read?" Her pale face moved closer as she leaned across the bed.

"Don't read!" I raved at her. "Remember what you've seen already—'Chant out the spell and give me life again!' "

The parchment slid slowly out from under the down-pressed parasol. I could hold it no easier than if it had been a moist melon seed. It reached my foot—*ugh!* It was climbing my leg.

What was it up to? Merciful heavens, would it scale my body as a squirrel scales a tree, would it drape itself upon my face and force its unspeakable message into my eyes and my mind? Because then I'd *have* to speak.

The burden of it would be too great. My lips would open to ease the torture. "Chant out the spell"—chant it out, and the world would be crushed again under the fearsome feet of Chthulhu and his brother-horrors of the evil eld. What sins and woes would run loose, at which Satan in hell must hide his shocked face? And it would be I, I, who spoke the words that released them.

I felt faint and dizzy, but I tore the repellent sheathing from my leg. For a moment it clung against my strength, as though with tendrils or suckers. With all my force I dashed it into a metal waste-basket, among crumpled heaps of paper. It tried to flop out again, but I pushed it back with the parasol. At the same time I clutched my cigarette lighter from the bedside table. Thank heaven it worked, it burst into flame. I flung it into the basket.

The whole mass of paper burst into fire and smoke. Up from the midst of it rose a faint, throbbing squeak, to be felt rather than heard, like the voice of a bat far away. Deeper into the little furnace I thrust that outcast messenger from the forces that threatened my world.

The flames worried it, and it crinkled and thrashed as if in agony, but it did not burn. Prodding it back again and again, I must have shouted something in my despair, for Gwen hurried to the telephone and jabbered into it.

"Father O'Neal!" she cried. "Come quick, with holy water!"

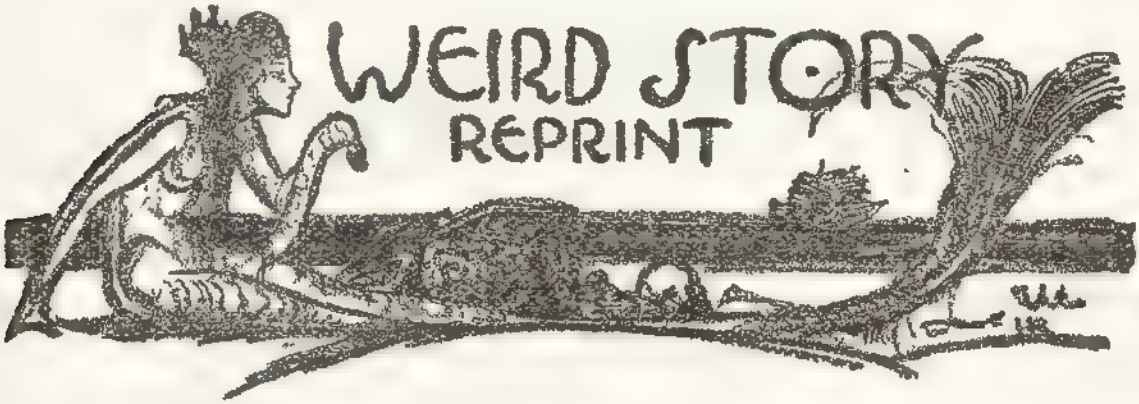
Hanging up, she turned to me.

"Is he coming?" I panted.

"Yes, he'll be here in two minutes." Her voice quavered. "But what if the holy water doesn't work?"

It did work. At the first spatter, the unhallowed page and its prodigious gospel of wickedness vanished into a fluff of ashes. I pray my thankfulness for that, every day that I live. Yet, even as I offer thanks, my troubled mind forms again the question that Gwen asked:

What if the holy water had not worked?



The Statement of Randolph Carter*

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

I REPEAT to you, gentlemen, that your inquisition is fruitless. Detain me here for ever if you will; confine or execute me if you must have a victim to propitiate the illusion you call justice; but I can say no more than I have said already. Everything that I can remember, I have told with perfect candor. Nothing has been distorted or concealed, and if anything remains vague, it is only because of the dark cloud which has come over my mind—that cloud and the nebulous nature of the horrors which brought it upon me.

Again I say, I do not know what has

*From WEIRD TALES for February, 1925

become of Harley Warren, though I think—almost hope—that he is in peaceful oblivion, if there be anywhere so blessed a thing. It is true that I have for five years been his closest friend, and a partial sharer of his terrible researches into the unknown. I will not deny, though my memory is uncertain and indistinct, that this witness of yours may have seen us together as he says, on the Gainsville pike, walking toward Big Cypress Swamp, at half past eleven on that awful night. That we bore electric lanterns, spades, and a curious coil of wire with attached instruments, I will even affirm; for these things all played a part in the single hideous scene which remains burned into my shaken recollection. But of what followed, and of the reason I was found alone and dazed on the edge of the swamp next morning, I must insist that I know nothing save what I have told you over and over again. You say to me that there is nothing in the swamp or near it which could form the setting of that frightful episode. I reply that I knew nothing beyond what I saw. Vision or nightmare it may have been—vision or nightmare I fervently hope it was—yet it is all that my mind retains of what took place in those shocking hours after we left the sight of men. And why Harley Warren did not return, he or his shade—or some nameless *thing* I cannot describe—alone can tell.

As I have said before, the weird studies of Harley Warren were well known to me, and to some extent shared by me. Of his vast collection of strange, rare books on forbidden subjects I have read all that are written in the languages of which I am master; but these are few as compared with those in languages I cannot understand. Most, I believe, are in Arabic; and the fiend-inspired book which brought on the end—the book which he carried in his pocket out of the world—was written in characters whose like I never saw elsewhere. Warren would never tell me just what was in that book. As to the nature of our studies—must I say again that I no longer retain full comprehension? It seems to me rather merciful that I do not, for they were terrible studies, which I pursued more through reluctant fascination than through actual inclination. Warren always dominated me, and sometimes I feared him. I remember how I shuddered at his facial expression on the night before the awful happening, when he talked so incessantly of his theory, why certain corpses never decay, but rest firm and fat in their tombs for a thousand years. But I do not fear him now, for I suspect that he has known horrors beyond my ken. Now I fear *for* him.

Once more I say that I have no clear idea of our object on that night. Certainly, it had much to do with something in the book which Warren carried with him—that ancient book in undecipherable characters which had come to him from India a month before—but I swear I do not know what it was that we expected to find. Your witness says he saw us at half past eleven on the Gainsville pike, headed for Big Cypress Swamp. This is probably true, but I have no distinct memory of it. The picture seared into my soul is of one scene only, and the hour must have been long after midnight; for a waning crescent moon was high in the vaporous heavens.

The place was an ancient cemetery; so ancient that I trembled at the manifold signs of immemorial years. It was in a deep, damp hollow, overgrown with rank grass, moss, and curious creeping weeds, and filled with a vague stench which my idle fancy associated absurdly with rotting stone. On every hand were the signs of neglect and decrepitude, and

I seemed haunted by the notion that Warren and I were the first living creatures to invade a lethal silence of centuries. Over the valley's rim a wan, waning crescent moon peered through the noisome vapors that seemed to emanate from unheard-of catacombs, and by its feeble, wavering beams I could distinguish a repellent array of antique slabs, urns, cenotaphs, and mausolean façades; all crumbling, moss-grown, and moisture-stained, and partly concealed by the gross luxuriance of the unhealthy vegetation.

My first vivid impression of my own presence in this terrible necropolis concerns the act of pausing with Warren before a certain half-obliterated sepulcher, and of throwing down some burdens which we seemed to have been carrying. I now observed that I had with me an electric lantern and two spades, whilst my companion was supplied with a similar lantern and a portable telephone outfit. No word was uttered, for the spot and the task seemed known to us; and without delay we seized our spades and commenced to clear away the grass, weeds, and drifted earth from the flat, archaic mortuary. After uncovering the entire surface, which consisted of three immense granite slabs, we stepped back some distance to survey the charnel scene; and Warren appeared to make some mental calculations. Then he returned to the sepulcher, and using his spade as a lever, sought to pry up the slab lying nearest to a stony ruin which may have been a monument in its day. He did not succeed, and motioned to me to come to his assistance. Finally our combined strength loosened the stone, which we raised and tipped to one side.

The removal of the slab revealed a black aperture, from which rushed an effluence of miasmal gases so nauseous that we started back in horror. After an interval, however, we approached the pit again, and found the exhalations less unbearable. Our lanterns disclosed the top of a flight of stone steps, dripping with some destestable ichor of the inner earth, and bordered by moist walls encrusted with niter. And now for the first time my memory records verbal discourse, Warren addressing me at length in his mellow tenor voice; a voice singularly unperturbed by our awesome surroundings.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you to stay on the surface," he said, "but it would be a crime to let anyone with your frail nerves go down there. You can't imagine, even from what you have read and from what I've told you, the things I shall have to see and do. It's fiendish work, Carter, and I doubt if any man without ironclad sensibilities could ever see it through and come up alive and sane. I don't wish to offend you, and Heaven knows I'd be glad enough to have you with me; but the responsibility is in a certain sense mine, and I couldn't drag a bundle of nerves like you down to probable death or madness. I tell you, you can't imagine what the thing is really like! But I promise to keep you informed over the telephone of every move—you see I've enough wire here to reach to the center of the earth and back!"

I can still hear, in memory, those coolly spoken words; and I can still remember my remonstrances. I seemed desperately anxious to accompany my friend into those sepulchral depths, yet he proved inflexibly obdurate. At one time he threatened to abandon the expedition if I remained insistent; a threat which proved effective, since he alone held the key to the *thing*. All this I can still remember, though I no longer know what manner of *thing* we sought. After he had obtained my reluctant acquiescence in his design, Warren picked up the reel of wire and adjusted the instruments. At his

nod I took one of the latter and seated myself upon an aged, discolored gravestone close by the newly uncovered aperture. Then he shook my hand, shouldered the coil of wire, and disappeared within that indescribable ossuary.

For a minute I kept sight of the glow of his lantern, and heard the rustle of the wire as he laid it down after him; but the glow soon disappeared abruptly, as if a turn in the stone staircase had been encountered, and the sound died away almost as quickly. I was alone, yet bound to the unknown depths by those magic strands whose insulated surface lay green beneath the struggling beams of that waning crescent moon.

In the lone silence of that hoary and deserted city of the dead, my mind conceived the most ghastly fantasies and illusions; and the grotesque shrines and monoliths seemed to assume a hideous personality — a half-sentience. Amorphous shadows seemed to lurk in the darker recesses of the weed-choked hollow and to flit as in some blasphemous ceremonial procession past the portals of the moldering tombs in the hillside; shadows which could not have been cast by that pallid, peering crescent moon.

I constantly consulted my watch by the light of my electric lantern, and listened with feverish anxiety at the receiver of the telephone; but for more than a quarter of an hour heard nothing. Then a faint clicking came from the instrument, and I called down to my friend in a tense voice. Apprehensive as I was, I was nevertheless unprepared for the words which came up from that uncanny vault in accents more alarmed and quivering than any I had heard before from Harley Warren. He who had so calmly left me a little while previously, now called from below in a shaky whisper more portentous than the loudest shriek:

"God! If you could see what I am seeing!"

I could not answer. Speechless, I could only wait. Then came the frenzied tones again:

"Carter, it's terrible—monstrous—unbelievable!"

This time my voice did not fail me, and I poured into the transmitter a flood of excited questions. Terrified, I continued to repeat, "Warren, what is it? What is it?"

Once more came the voice of my friend, still hoarse with fear, and now apparently tinged with despair:

"I can't tell you, Carter! It's too utterly beyond thought—I dare not tell you—no man could know it and live—Great God! I never dreamed of *this!*"

Stillness again, save for my now incoherent torrent of shuddering inquiry. Then the voice of Warren in a pitch of wilder consternation:

"Carter! for the love of God, put back the slab and get out of this if you can! Quick!—leave everything else and make for the outside—it's your only chance! Do as I say, and don't ask me to explain!"

I heard, yet was able only to repeat my frantic questions. Around me were the tombs and the darkness and the shadows; below me, some peril beyond the radius of the human imagination. But my friend was in greater danger than I, and through my fear I felt a vague resentment that he should deem me capable of deserting him under such circumstances. More clicking, and after a pause a piteous cry from Warren:

"Beat it! For God's sake, put back the slab and beat it, Carter!"

Something in the boyish slang of my evidently stricken companion unleashed

my faculties. I formed and shouted a resolution, "Warren, brace up! I'm coming down!" But at this offer the tone of my auditor changed to a scream of utter despair:

"Don't! You can't understand! It's too late—and my own fault. Put back the slab and run—there's nothing else you or anyone can do now!"

The tone changed again, this time acquiring a softer quality, as of hopeless resignation. Yet it remained tense through anxiety for me.

"Quick—before it's too late!"

I tried not to heed him; tried to break through the paralysis which held me, and to fulfill my vow to rush down to his aid. But his next whisper found me still held inert in the chains of stark horror.

"Carter—hurry! It's no use—you must go—better one than two—the slab——"

A pause, more clicking, then the faint voice of Warren:

"Nearly over now—don't make it harder—cover up those damned steps and run for your life—you're losing time—so long, Carter—won't see you again."

Here Warren's whisper swelled into a cry; a cry that gradually rose to a shriek fraught with all the horror of the ages:

"Curse these hellish things—legions—My God! Beat it! *Beat it!* BEAT IT!"

After that was silence. I know not how many interminable eons I sat stupefied; whispering, muttering, calling, screaming into that telephone. Over and over again through those eons I whispered and muttered, called, shouted, and screamed, "Warren! Warren! Answer me—are you there?"

And then there came to me the crowning horror of all—the unbelievable, unthinkable, almost unmentionable thing. I have said that eons seemed to elapse after Warren shrieked forth his last despairing warning, and that only my own cries now broke the hideous silence. But after a while there was a further clicking in the receiver, and I strained my ears to listen. Again I called down, "Warren, are you there?" and in answer heard the *thing* which has brought this cloud over my mind. I do not try, gentlemen, to account for that *thing*—that voice—nor can I venture to describe it in detail, since the first words took away my consciousness and created a mental blank which reaches to the time of my awakening in the hospital. Shall I say that the voice was deep; hollow; gelatinous; remote; unearthly; inhuman; disembodied? What shall I say? It was the end of my experience, and is the end of my story. I heard it, and knew no more—heard it as I sat petrified in that unknown cemetery in the hollow, amidst the crumbling stones and the falling tombs, the rank vegetation and the miasmal vapors—heard it well up from the innermost depths of that damnable open sepulcher as I watched amorphous, necrophagous shadows dance beneath an accursed waning moon.

And this is what it said:

"You fool, Warren is DEAD!"

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE girl faced the ikon and we saw her bosom heave beneath its sheath of gleaming fur. Her breath came rasping, grindingly, almost like the labored breathing of a patient *in extremis* with nephritis. A little skirl of laughter stung her scarlet mouth, not loud, but terribly intense. I thought that never had I heard a cry more blasphemous than that light cachinnation.

Her eyes were straining toward the ikon which she had thrown open so its triple picture caught the full force of the ever-shifting beams which slanted downward from the swinging lamps. They were fixed, intense, half closed, as though the violence of her gaze was too annihilating to be loosed direct; it seemed as though the very substance of her soul and body would pour out of those set, staring eyes.

"Master," came her thin-edged whisper, mordant as a storm-blast in December, "lord, possessor, ever-living conqueror of flesh and soul and spirit—I am here!"

Strangely mystic she stood there; more mysterious, the odd thought came to me, in the starkness of her nudity than when hidden in the swathe of clinging garments.

Statue-still she stood, only her left hand moving a little as it fluttered upward toward her breast, then forward, like a tower toppling when its cornerstone is wrenched away, like a silver-birch tree crashing when the axman's final stroke cuts through its roots, she fell face-downward on the floor and lay there motionless.

The lamplight glimmered on the whiteness of her body and the bright gold of her hair, flecking, flowing shadows interchanging quickly with bright spots of light as she clasped her hands behind her neck and beat her forehead softly on the floor before the ikon.

"The pictures—*mort d'un rat!*—see the pictures, good Friend Trowbridge; do you see them now?" de Grandin whispered in my ear.

I saw, and a wave of retching nausea swept across me as I looked. . . .

You cannot afford to miss even a word of this fascinating thrill-tale about Jules de Grandin, ghost-breaker extraordinary; for weird was the doom and evil was the influence that emanated from the mosaic picture on the wall. This powerful novelette will be published complete in the September issue of WEIRD TALES:

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——Also——

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THE LAKE OF LIFE

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PSYCHOPOMPOS

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A posthumous tale of horror written in rime by one of the supreme masters of weird fiction.

THE HO-HO-KAM HORROR

By BRUCE BRYAN

It was a very real and tangible horror that closed in on the archeologist on Superstition Mountain, as described in the fascinating pages of this thrilling goose-flesh story. Here is a story you will not easily forget.

September Issue Weird Tales . . Out August 1

SINCE the death of H. P. Lovecraft last March, there has been a growing demand for a book collection of his marvelous stories. Now it seems that Mr. Lovecraft's admirers will have their wish; for Donald Wandrei and August W. Derleth are preparing a collection of his tales, prose miscellany, poems, and letters, which will run to at least four volumes. Mr. Lovecraft's letters give an insight into the man's character, and show his kindliness, his scholarly qualities, and his keen incisive analytical ability and unerring literary judgment. If any among you, our readers, have in your possession any interesting letters from Mr. Lovecraft, Messrs. Wandrei and Derleth would like to see them. You will be doing a service to the memory of a great literary artist by calling these letters to the attention of August W. Derleth, whose address is Sauk City, Wisconsin.

In Memoriam

Mrs. Hazel Heald writes from Newtonville, Massachusetts: "A brain like H. P. Lovecraft's seldom was found—uncanny in its intelligence. He was ever searching for more knowledge, gleaning by endless hours of study a richer and fuller understanding of people and of life. Being a great traveler, he reveled in the study of old cities and their hidden lore and would walk many miles to inspect some historic spot. He was a real friend to all who knew him, always ready to give his valuable time to aid some poor struggling author—a true guiding star. He was very partial to dumb animals, especially cats, signifying that interest in several of his tales. He would step out of his way to pat some forlorn alley cat and give it a friendly word, and the kittens of a neighbor furnished him unbounded enjoyment. He was an ardent lover of architecture and all the fine arts, and a day spent in a museum with him was time well spent. By endless hours of toil he worked far into the night giving the world masterpieces of weird fiction, sacrificing his health for his work. Lovecraft was a gift to the world who can never be replaced—Humanity's Friend."

Removed from the Stands

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "Although I read the June issue the first day it came out, this is the first opportunity I have had to type my usual letter to the Eyrie. However, as the motto goes, 'Tis better late, than never.' The cover by Brundage is beautiful. However, if you continue to have such covers, I'm afraid I'll be unable to obtain WEIRD TALES. Over here in Philly, they're collecting all magazines that display unclad females for fear that the police will seize them. There is some kind of law over here prohibiting the sale of pornographic literature—however, I'm sure that if the inspectors would read the interior of the magazine, they'd find nothing wrong with it. . . . I hope that I can obtain my July issue. If not, I suppose I'll have to subscribe, for nothing can keep me from reading WEIRD TALES! To get down to the rest of the magazine, however: *The Black Kiss* by Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner is a gem of a story—it is undoubtedly the best complete story in the issue. The end of the tale is altogether different from what I had expected it to be—that in itself made it a 'different' story. *The Carnal God* by John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer is another swell story, and closely follows *The Black Kiss* in the race for first place. *Clicking Red Heels* by Paul Ernst is another fine yarn. However, Mr. Ernst, what has become of that arch-villain, Doctor Satan? The serial is superb. The issue as a whole is excellent.

The illustration, by Finlay of course, for *The Black Kiss* is undoubtedly one of the best he's drawn. To me, that illustration in itself is well worth the price of the magazine. The rest of the illustrations are very good also. That detestable coupon should be obliterated. In that space could be printed a few more interesting letters to the Eyrie."

Late at Night

J. Z. Thompson writes from Glendale, California: "I am in agreement with the black boy who said 'There ain't no fun in a graveyard, gimme my flowers now.' And so in keeping, I want to hand Mr. John R. Speer a bouquet of orchids. Last night I drove into a little town that had pretty well gone to bed. I wanted something to read, and asked the night clerk if he could help out. He handed me a couple of magazines, one of which was WEIRD TALES. The other, a weekly, I'd read. I took one look at the cover of WEIRD TALES and said, 'Oh, one of those kind!' I said it with a distinct sneer. Well, I had nothing also to read, so I started *Symphony of the Damned*. Now I'll tell you something, and this comes honestly and sincerely, straight from the shoulder: that story was one of the most pulse-pepping yarns I ever read. I've never before gone into that sort of story reading, but I'm a fan from now on. Speer has the unusual faculty of blending the impossible into an unbelievable realism. His lines sort of say, 'Of course I'm not trying to make you believe all this,' and then I can just imagine him grinning and saying, 'But you know it *might* be true.' I extend to your publication my sincerest wishes for a continued success; and a well deserved one."

Condolence

Melville S. Church, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Having read in your current issue of the untimely death of H. P. Lovecraft, please allow me to express my deep sorrow at our mutual loss. I sincerely believe that the works of Mr. Lovecraft will go down in the field of weird literature as surpassing those of Poe, and all contemporary authors. Mr. Lovecraft, in my humble opinion, was a real creative artist, and his creations will live in our memory for ever. I have just completed the current (June) issue, and find it

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(as I have for ten years) to be head and shoulders above the field. Having read the controversy concerning covers with great interest, may I inform you that I have found your covers, as your stories, far surpassing those of other magazines? My favorite story was *The Carnal God,* with *Clicking Red Heels* running a close second."

A Different Sort of Story

Mrs. H. L. Phillips, of Quincy, Illinois, writes: "I seldom write such letters as this but I want to express my approval of *The Carnal God* by John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer. It was a thrilling and different sort of story and very interesting. I would enjoy more by the same authors. The plot was quick and interesting and the style was clear. Your magazine in general is very interesting."

Doctor Lamontaine

Robert J. Hoyer, of Chicago, writes: "Your new writer, John Speer, is a real find. His first story, *Symphony of the Damned,* was very good, but his latest in conjunction with Carlisle Schnitzer was even better. *The Carnal God* had everything: weirdness, excitement, and an interest that carried the reader from the first page to the last breathlessly. I was a bit sorry that Pierre Soret succumbed to the forces of Sudre at the close. I had begun to hope that WEIRD TALES had added another character to take its place beside Jules de Grandin, Northwest Smith, Jirel of Joiry, and the rest. But in Doctor Lamontaine I think you *have* captured a new character to become one of the magazine's perennial favorites. At least I hope so. I already find myself possessed of a strong liking for the bearded, burly, rum-guzzling doctor, who, apparently, fears neither man nor devil. Let's have more of Doctor Lamontaine soon, and keep him coming. I think he ought to click with most of our brethren. Now for a few words on your current serial, *The Last Pharaoh.* I'll frankly confess that the first installment didn't intrigue yours truly overly much, but the second installment, which I've just finished, more than makes up for it. If the following installments equal the second I'll be more than satisfied. As for *Return to Earth*—well, does satire belong in a magazine dedicated to weird stories? It might be a good mirror in which to see the frailties of modern man reflected, but personally, I read the magazine for weirdness and thrills and not for adverse criticism on myself and my fellow-men as a whole. It was rather well constructed though. . . . Where have you been hiding Clark Ashton Smith and C. L. Moore lately? Don't you think that they're due for another yarn apiece soon? You know, even though we applaud and praise the newcomers, we can't forget our old stand-bys; and now, especially since we've lost two of them, Howard and Lovecraft, in so short a space of time, we ought to have more stories than usual from the rest of the older favorites. So come on, and give us a break." [Both Smith and Moore will shortly be represented in WT with splendid new stories; Moore's story will bring about a meeting of Jirel and Northwest Smith.—THE EDITOR.]

Howard and Lovecraft

Mearle Prout writes from Stillwater, Oklahoma: "The last issue of WEIRD TALES brought me the sad news of the death of Lovecraft. Coming so soon after the death of Robert E. Howard, the tragedy is all the more painful. I did not have the good fortune to be personally acquainted with either of these men; but so great was my enjoyment of their work that our mutual loss seems a very personal one to me. I can only add my plea to that of your other readers that the complete works of these writers be published soon in book form."

The Master of Weird Fiction

N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, writes: "It was with a shock like that of a physical blow, that I read yesterday (in the June issue of WT) that the Master of weird fiction has passed from us. It seemed impossible that death could ever touch even the mortal clay of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. As Wordsworth wrote of Milton: 'Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart; thou hadst a voice whose sound was as the sea, pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.' It is with no disparagement to many able writers that I say that WEIRD TALES can never be quite the same to me again. It and Lovecraft were almost synonymous, to my mind; his work dominated every issue in which it appeared, and his spirit pervaded the pages, even when his pen was not represented there. My first move, usually, in opening a new copy of

WEIRD TALES—and I still have every issue of the last eleven years—is to look for the reprint story, in the hope that it may be one of Lovecraft's. My next glance is at the schedule of contents for the following number, hoping to find his name there. Then, before reading any of the stories, I turn to the Eyrie; there it was, yesterday, that I read the staggering news. To attempt to name Lovecraft's best work would be a mere grouping of individual tastes, in a field of super-superlatives, for he never wrote a second-rater; nothing was allowed to leave his hands until it had the polished perfection of a cameo. To me, some of his earlier and shorter stories stand out even more vividly than his overpowering later work. For instance, *The Music of Erich Zann*, a masterpiece of abstract horror; *The Outsider*, a classic, of course, of the outré; *The Festival*, *Pickman's Model*, and *The Lurking Fear*, the last of these a particular stand-out because of its potential reality. While some writers exhaust the dictionary in their efforts to picture the horror with which they are dealing, Lovecraft's technique was far

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June	....	June	June	June	June
. ...	July	July	July	July	July
Aug.	. .	....	....	. .	
....	....	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	
...	.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct	
....	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	
Dec.	....	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

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superior, for he gave the impression always of striving to conceal or to minimize horror, instead of painting it in rainbow colors and in circus poster type. . . . Lovecraft's passing is not a case of 'The King is dead; long live the King!', for there is no heir-apparent to succeed to the crown. There are several younger writers—one woman in particular—who show marked promise, and who, I believe, acknowledge that they owe much in encouragement and inspiration to H. P. L. Let us hope they can carry on his traditions. They are not Lovecrafts; they may never be; but the fact that their work demands comparison with his, and appraisal by the standard of perfection which he set, is in itself a high tribute. Mrs. Heald, Mr. Bloch and Mr. Kuttner are facing a challenging future."

One Pair of Shoes

T. O. Mabbott, of New York, writes: "*Clicking Red Heels,* by Paul Ernst, is a grand story—but then it has to have a reasoned-out explanation. But that explanation is a bad one—how did the hollow where the ghost sat appear? And didn't the young man have more than one pair of shoes? Aristotle says, 'Better a credible impossibility than an incredible possibility.' I find it easier to believe a millionaire haunted than a millionaire with only one pair of shoes—and I like my weird tales *weird.*"

The Mark of the Monster

Mrs. Mark Shover, of Battle Creek, Michigan, writes: "Your magazine is *unique,* as you have subtitled it. A pulp that maintains such a high standard of excellence is to be commended, but see that you do keep the standard. Surely there are better stories coming to your office than *The Mark of the Monster.* It was so obviously a formula yarn, and the choice of words did not serve to give an atmosphere. Now I have no quarrel with the word 'horror,' nor 'evil,' in fact with any of the poor, overused words in this story, but I do maintain that both atmosphere and action can be achieved with simpler and more plausible setting and writing. As a concrete example of my point, the story by Derleth *(The Wind from the River)* makes use of none of the haggard old words, yet the atmosphere certainly is one to carry conviction. I should like to compliment you also on your story *Vallisneria Madness,* by Farley, as being a fanciful, charming story with a good choice of words. Keep WEIRD TALES the Unique Magazine."

A Plea for Serials

E. M. Stubbs, of Detroit, writes: "The new serial starts out fine. For several months you have been discontinuing serials, and I have missed them greatly. Who can ever forget *The People of the Black Circle, Golden Blood,* and *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof?* Your best stories have been serials, and it would be a poor policy to omit them. Again may I put in my plea for longer reprints? If necessary, decrease the size of the type in the reprint department. Why not ask the readers to vote upon this matter? The covers by Finlay are superb. They are finely drawn, and they possess a genuine weirdness. St. John is another fine illustrator; yet I have seen no covers by him for several months."

That Bloch-Kuttner Yarn

Willis Conover, Jr., of Cambridge, Maryland, writes: "The Bloch-Kuttner collaborative effort truly ranks among your finest stories of recent months. Bob and Hank have turned out a tale equal in many respects to some of HPL's. Nice work, fellers. Sailor Speer's debut was marked by a better-than-average yarn; but his second WT opus fails to interest me—merely a mess of pseudo-scientific love-adventure with a generous dash of high-priestess, sex, and gore. Or maybe my literary standards are cockeyed. Try again, Sir John; let's hope for something more worthy next time."

Evaluation of Lovecraft

Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey, writes: "Lovecraft was gifted with a remarkable imagination and was the possessor of one of the most perfect and striking English styles that I have ever encountered. If you ever publish a book of Lovecraft's stories I earnestly hope you will include *The Rats in the Walls,* which I consider to be his masterpiece. And more than this, I think it is the best weird story I have ever read, and this is saying a great deal. Among Lovecraft's other outstanding stories I would mention *The Dunwich Horror, The Lurking Fear, The Whisperer in Darkness, The Hound* and *The Thing on the Door-Step.*"

A Tribute to Lovecraft

Robert W. Lowndes, of Stamford, Connecticut, writes: "Being, in all likelihood, one of the last followers of H. P. Lovecraft's magnificent work in the fantasy field to enter into correspondence with him, it may seem somewhat strange for me to say that it is as though I had lost a beloved friend of many years' acquaintance. Yet this is the case, and those who knew him far better than I did can understand my feelings: there is consolation of a sort in the thought that if I, who knew him but through the media of two letters and a few of his tales, am grieved with the knowledge that there can be no more friendly, wise, generous, and inspiring letters from him, what must be the feelings of those who had been corresponding with him regularly over a period of years, or who knew him personally? As he himself wrote of Robert E. Howard, only a few short months ago, weird and fantastic fiction will be terribly impoverished by his passing; as E. Hoffmann Price wrote of Howard, the personal loss of H. P. Lovecraft to those who knew him, and those who corresponded with him, dwarfs all else into insignificance. How well recalled is the first Lovecraft tale I read (in my first issue of WEIRD TALES at that—October, 1931): *The Strange High House in the Mist.* Then, a gradual but steady increase in my little fund of tales and novelettes from his pen until he rose to undisputed supremacy in my affections. I often dreamed of meeting him some day; hoped to write to him. . . . I finally ventured a letter. What a moment it was for me when I saw a letter in return! His first paragraph assured me that I need have no hesitation in writing to him; then, after putting me at ease, he launched forth into discussion of the several points I had raised, in that friendly, acute, and understanding way which others know so much better than I do. He had the unique faculty of making a worshipper feel that what one wrote to him was as interesting as what he had to offer in reply. WEIRD TALES has printed the majority of Lovecraft's published works, I believe, but he is not well-known outside of the circle of WEIRD TALES readers and fantasy enthusiasts. Can we readers hope that eventually someone will collect all of his works and publish them in a single volume? What a treasure for the lovers of the weird

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Miscellaneous

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and the fantastic that would be! An even greater treasure would be a compilation of his masterly, though enormous, correspondence; yet what splendid reading his letters would make, even though they ran to a number of volumes! Yet, great as these are, they can go but a little way to approach the greatest treasure of all for those who were acquainted with him: the man, Howard Phillips Lovecraft himself." [Since Mr. Lovecraft's death we have obtained several posthumous stories and poems from his inspired pen, and these will be published in forthcoming issues of this magazine. Your question as to a collection of his stories is answered in the opening paragraph of the Eyrie.—THE EDITOR.]

Random Notes by W. C., Jr.

Here are a few random jottings which may be interesting to Weird Talers—notes on what's what in the fantasy world these days. . . . C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner have collaborated on a new weird tale in which Jirel of Joiry meets Northwest Smith and Yarol. . . . Mrs. Seabury Quinn didn't care for the Old Marster's *Children of the Bat* at all. Thought it a trifle too gory. . . . Otto Binder has written all the more recent 'Eando' stories by himself. As he now lives in New York City and Earl in Chicago, collaboration would be difficult. . . John R. Speer, who authored *Symphony of the Damned* and, in part, *The Carnal God,* used to be an actor by profession. The depression hit him hard, so he joined the U. S. Navy. . . . Another fan magazine which has dropped out of the field is *Science-Fantasy Correspondent.* . . . Earl Pierce, Jr., and Bruce Bryan, both of Washington, D. C., have collaborated on *The White Rat*—a revision of Peirce's *The Surgery Master,* which was previously rejected by Editor Wright. . . . *Satan's Palimpsest,* Seabury Quinn's latest, appears in the September WT. Virgil Finlay will do a portrait of Jules de Grandin for the story. Cover by Brundage.

"Comin' Again Some Day"

H. Sivia, of Palestine, Texas, writes: "I can't forget Virgil Finlay's illustration for Hazel Heald's *The Horror in the Burying-Ground.* It's so eery and wild. And the caption was so appropriately chosen. I think I have been to places like the one she describes in the piny woods. And believe me, when the wind blows, a person can hear almost anything out there—even the awful 'Comin' again some day.' Your serial *The Last Pharaoh* looks promising, although the writing style seems a shade on the English side. Edgar Daniel Kramer and Dorothy Quick came through splendidly with exquisite verse. It seems to me that Mr. Kramer never has that dreamy tone to any of his verses except those printed in WT. Undoubtedly he is a past master at the art of slanting. I notice Henry Kuttner tried his hand at aping Lovecraft. Not bad either. . . . Best story, or at least the one I most thoroughly enjoyed in the May issue, was *Duar the Accursed* by Clifford Ball. I would say, in a muted undertone, that Ball writes like the late Robert E. Howard—but that would be sacrilege."

An Entomologist Protests

Arthur D. Hall, of Nappan Station, Nova Scotia, writes: "Something I saw in the December issue of your magazine has moved me to write to you in protest. In fact I wish to raise a controversy on the subject and get it settled for good and all. I refer to a passage in *The Cyclops of Xoatl.* On page 576 Bart Leslie is saying, referring to the German: 'He'll damn soon confine his efforts to butterfly chasing.' This is the question I wish to raise. Why do writers when they wish to convey the impression of a timid sissyfied man, most often describe him as a butterfly chaser, and why is a collector of moths and butterflies spoken of in terms of contempt? I am, myself, what I suppose would be called a butterfly chaser, having been interested in entomology, particularly Lepidoptera, all my life. Yet I do not think I am either particularly timid, or a sissy. I have worked at jobs which do not convey that impression anyway, having been among other things, a sandhog, a deep-sea diver, a dynamite charger and firer. I was at the Great War for four years and at a couple of little ones before that. I have sailed the seven seas, and been in some little-known places. I have 'shot it out' in places where the pistol was law, and been trapping alone, where I never saw a soul for months at a time. Even the actual catching of moths is not such a sissyfied occupation as one might think. These are mostly caught at night, and I've seen some of your 'red-blooded men' who would hesitate to go (as we go, and

think nothing of it) into the bush and lonely places alone, and stay there maybe from sunset to sunrise, in spite of noxious insects and wild animals, which are a real menace in the hotter countries. It is generally overlooked that the study of entomology has been of real benefit to mankind in many ways. Entomology has been the means of understanding diseases that are very prevalent, notably malaria and African sleeping-sickness. It is of untold value to agriculture, yet the common idea persists that because a man takes an interest in collecting insects, which is the only way to classify them and learn their habits and their actions, he must be harmlessly crazy. Now, all you bug-hunters and anti bug-hunters, let us hear your views on the subject. Is there *one* well-known authentic case of a crazy man collecting insects? The study of entomology is an education in itself, for one cannot go very far in it without acquiring a certain amount of learning, as the names they are known by are mostly Latin and Greek, or of that origin, as are also the technical terms used. On second thoughts, your magazine is not perhaps the medium I would have chosen to raise this question, were it not for the fact that the passage complained about occurred in your magazine. But the reason I think it may not be the happiest choice is, that, did I have the faintest shadow of belief in werewolves, ghosts, zombies, and haunters of the dark, djinns, devils or incubi, I would be afraid to continue my hobby of collecting moths in the lonesome places of the earth, at the witching hour of midnight, and later, as I am a regular subscriber to your magazine, as I find it real interesting."

H. P. L.

Samuel Gordon writes from Washington D. C.: "Spinoza's tomb carries an inscri tion which runs something like this: 'H lies a man who was closer to God than other mortal.' If there ever lived a man was apparently closer to the essence of weird in nature than Lovecraft was, not know of him. He seemed to s world far from the commonplace; a with hidden meanings and innuendoe cosmos peopled with demons and gods o than the first star. And who can definit say that Lovecraft saw but illusions? In these days of stark realism, of wars and rumors of

NEXT MONTH

The Lake of Life

By Edmond Hamilton

Here is a weird-scientific thrill-tale that combines adventure, mystery and romance—the story of a modern Ponce de Leon who searched for the elixir of immortality. Deep down below the vast crater formed in prehistoric times by the striking of a mighty meteorite he found the lake, glowing with radio-active life force from outer space, but it was warded by the dread Guardians, as was foretold in an ancient legend.

The pages of this astonishing weird novel relate the fascinating quest of the fabled lake in an African wilderness by Clark Stannard and his intrepid little band; and tells of the terrible mountains of destruction, of the Red [illegible] and of the

wars, of cracked politics and politicians, of 200% Americans and enemies that bore from within, it was more than relief to turn to a Lovecraft story; it was a rare treat and a positive delight. He may have written from a sense of belief; or half-belief, or with his tongue in his cheek. But, regardless, he will always live in the thoughts of those to whom he brought such pleasurable escape from what, for want of a better term, we call reality. I, for one, will miss Lovecraft and his stories."

Hugh Rankin's Art

J. Vernon Shea, Jr., of Pittsburgh, writes: "The April WEIRD TALES seemed to me one of the best issues in months. Probably the most distinguished tale was Derleth's *The Shuttered House*, one of his finest. Its quiet excellence contrasts sharply with the more melodramatic items. Peirce's *The Death Mask* had a good atmosphere, but the story was rather vague and unconvincing. I liked *Symphony of the Damned*, despite its technical inadequacies and its adherence to worn formulas. There was a fairy-tale quality which I found delectable; and Feroch demonstrated that characterization *does* have a place in weird fiction. Just a type character, of course, but he did have some breath of life. I read Bloch's *The Mannikin* with especial interest, for its basic idea was [illegible] for

Mr. Hasse, I sincerely hope to find him often in WEIRD TALES. I shall not soon forget that little hairless man and his tome of cosmic horror. . . . I have noticed for the past several months a lack of weird-scientific fiction in your pages. When you print stories of this type they are usually exceptional ones, of a far better caliber than what one finds in the so-called science-fiction mags. . . . Tales of the planets and of the spaces between, dimensional stories, time-traveling, the mysteries of infinity and the strange realms beyond the stars and even beyond space itself, have always been popular and fascinating and always will be. Why? Because Man, the insignificant, with an insatiable curiosity since the dawn of time, is continually pondering on and striving to learn from an enigmatic cosmos the secrets of time, space and infinity. I close with a plea for more of these stories."

Concise Comments

W. C. Pardue, of Dallas, writes: "When Edwin Baird has a story, in WEIRD TALES, or wheresoever, it is always the best story in the book. I read him first, and as opportunity affords I read the others. Your May issue is full of entrancing adventures into mental pyrotechnics."

S. Hugh McKenna, Jr., of Seaside, Oregon, writes: "I wish to add my voice to the myriads in expressing sorrow over the death of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. I can say no more—his stories, and the many friendships he has made, speak for themselves."

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Guess I'll hafta wait till next month for another installment of *The Last Pharaoh*—this one was far more exciting and interest-ng than the opening installment. Bodiless eads that are alive—only a genius or an ebriate can conceive such, and I'm inclined believe that Mr. Kelley leans more to the of the former."

Most Popular Story

aders, what are your favorite stories in issue? We will be glad to have you us a letter telling what stories you like what ones you dislike, and why, and it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your rite story in the June issue was *The Car- God*, that strange tale of a golden image nbued with evil life, by John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer.

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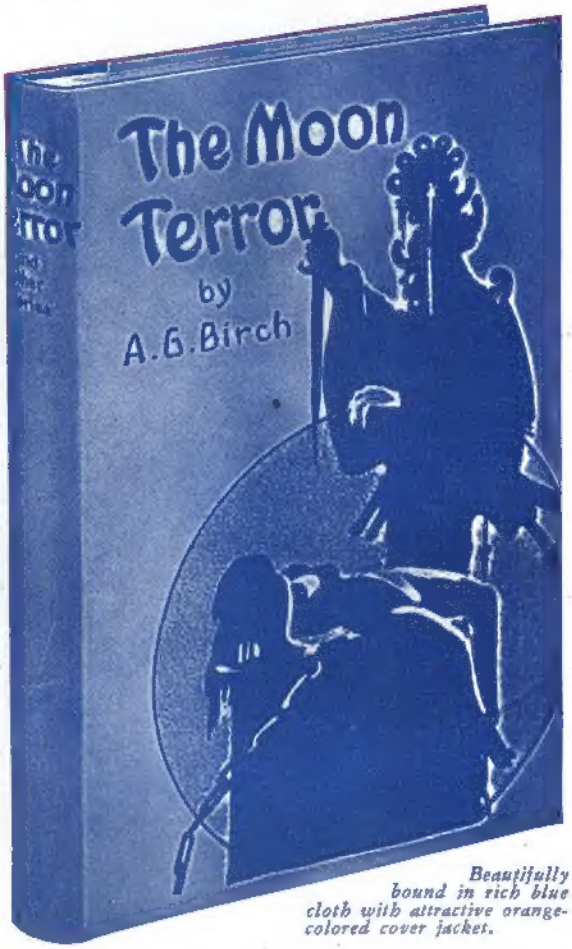

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